











# THE KING'S SECRET.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE LOST HEIR."

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Give it an understanding, but no tongue."

SHAKSPEARE.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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### CHAPTER I.

It was on the close of a remarkably fine afternoon, about the end of May, that unusual bustle was observable amongst the numerous craft plying on the grand canal, which together with the magnificent dock or basin connecting it with the Scheldt, had been but a short time previous completed at the expense of a wealthy burgher of the free city of Ghent.

Along the banks of this canal, on the present occasion, might be seen posted at equal

distances, a chain of stalwart looking fellows, evidently the retainers of some great personage, they being uniformly clad in stoutly pour-pointed jackets, having plates of steel at the shoulders, and over the centre of the breast, with short kirtles of dark blue and green hose, each wearing a bright iron-pot or skull-cap upon the head, a long sword by the side, carrying a small round target, braced upon the left arm, and over the shoulder a richly ornamented heavy partisan.

The confused buzz of some ill-heard cry, which coming from the direction of the river, first put these soldiers on the alert, and caused the corresponding bustle of which we speak, soon after became intelligibly distinct, and was passed quickly from lip to lip.

“Way there!—make way for the Ruward!” sounded along the waters of the canal, whilst in the extreme distance one of the knaves might be seen running at his best, until gaining the reliefs in waiting, he ceased his labour, and the fresh man in his turn as actively took foot, loudly repeating the same cry of warning,

leaving the spent runner to gather new breath, and follow at his leisure—and so was this potent word borne from one to another along the crowded canal, until it was stayed before the water-gate of a large mansion ; on the parapet of the wall of which there immediately after appeared several goodly men, all wearing the uniform already described, and all evidently on the look out for the same object.

Suddenly the expected vessel darted round a distant bend of the canal. It was a long gondola-like barge, and contrasted oddly enough with the country-built craft, which heavily moved aside as it swept gaily by.

Its appearance was novel to the north, and was singularly elegant for the period in question, when there were but few vessels built for other than trading purposes, and when in the construction of these, convenience of stowage was more looked to than beauty of outline.

The object in question then, presented neither the cumbrous bearings, nor deep sheer which distinguished her rivals, but was on the contrary, narrow beneath, and lying straight

and low in the water, offering to the bluff-bowed, round-bellied Hollanders, a prow sharp and fine as a modern Thames cutter, and as lightly skimmed by them, looking, as she swept rapidly along, like a sword-fish glancing through a startled schole of bottle-nosed whales.

Twelve able hands formed the crew of this strange boat, and with their shirt sleeves loosely drawn up and fastened on the shoulder, they bent them to the stroke in true tune and time. In the stern sheets stood the steersman, with a trencher-shaped paddle in his hand, the which being loosely grummeted to the stern-post, he could shift on to either quarter, as occasion required. This important personage wore the uniform we have already described, and lounging near him, upon the after-thwarts, were two or three other men similarly habited.

The space between this last group and the rowers, was enclosed with curtains of black cloth, and covered with a canopy of the same material ; the lining within partook not however of this sombre hue, being of a bright crim-

son colour ; whilst the raised flooring was supplied with a number of velvet covered cushions, which might be moved about, and so, with ease, be adapted to the comfort of the passenger.

Within this enclosure were now seated two grave personages, the meridian of whose lives was evidently some time past. The senior of the two, a tall spare man, very plainly clad, and having a shrewd but melancholy visage, sat bolt upright, as erect and as stiff as one of the gilded stanchions sustaining the awning over him, dully following with his eye the rapidly passing objects on the opposite shore.

The second was also a tall man, but having a breadth of shoulder, and weight of limb, every way proportioned to his lofty stature ; his long hair, and the thick beard, which he wore only on the chin, were both naturally of a light comely brown, but might now be described as more nearly approaching to grey.

His features were handsome, and if not absolutely dignified, were singularly intelligent and commanding. His eyes were of a clear blue, small but piercing ; his forehead was

high and broad ; his nose long, and slightly curved ; his lips something of the fullest, but well closed, and detracting in no wise from the general expression of his countenance, which bespoke him bold and audacious of purpose, prompt in resolve, and firm and immovable of purpose in pursuit.

Although thus familiarly associated, his dress partook not of his companion's plainness, since it consisted of a long gown of the finest blue cloth, lined and overlapped with rich brown fur, and cut away from the breast, to show beneath a yellow gambeson, thickly strewn with flowers of gold ; this fitting close, and coming down to the wrists, might be well discerned under the loose short sleeves of the gown, on the slightest elevation of the wearer's arms. The fulness of the outer habit was gathered in plaits, beneath an elaborately wrought waist belt, having hangers appended to it for both sword and dagger, but at present sustaining the latter weapon only ; his hose were of the like colour with the vest, and his shoes of blue velvet, richly embroidered.

With his miniver-lined hood thrown back on his shoulders, and his bonnet pulled low over his brow, he lay lounging, at full length, along the cushions, his head supported by his left hand, and his keen glance alternately moving from the blades of the active oars, to the distant object for which they made, as though he first counted the stroke, and then raised his eye to calculate the effect of the impetus thus given.

This man then, whom it has been thought meet thus curiously to describe, and who now so rapidly traversed the canal and basin of his own creation, was no less a personage than Jacob Van Artevelde, the demagogue ruler of Flanders, the proscriber of its legitimate Sovereign, and the sworn foe to nobility, yet the near friend of King Edward of England, and the stanchest ally of his foreign power.

Although Artevelde's present greatness was felt and acknowledged by all, yet of the early part of his career but little was truly known, save that he was a native of Flanders, of noble birth, who, for some heavy grief, had left

his father-land, and after a few years of foreign travel and adventure, again returned, but at this time, apparently, too humble in his fortunes, to render it an object in many to recall him to memory, or inquire of his past course.

After some time leading a life of seclusion and seeming idleness, he suddenly, to the surprise of all men, married with the much sought wealthy widow of a Brewer of Ghent, and so became a man of known substance, and consequent consideration. From this date, his course was sufficiently marked and rapid.

The tide of fortune, thus set fairly in, continued to flow full upon him; he early abandoned the limited occupation of his wife, and engaged in schemes of larger speculation, managing them with a dexterity and spirit of enterprise which soon left his less informed or more timid compeers far behind. His relations quickly over-leaped the narrow limits within which individual adventure had hitherto been confined, and were rapidly yet securely

extended under his guidance, far as the foot of trade could penetrate. *Yacob of Ghent* became famous throughout Europe, nor, indeed, was his fame bounded there, for his name was heard and its influence felt in lands where the proud rulers of Europe and their valiancies were alike unknown and unregarded.

He soon came to be accounted as by far the wealthiest merchant amongst the richest and most mercantile people of the age, and the influence this gave him in a community so constituted, he was not slow to exercise over all.

If the Prince or his improvident nobles needed money for their pleasures, they hurried to the rich Artevelde; did the clergy covet a saint from Rome or a relic from Jerusalem they applied to the pious Artevelde; the trader who wanted an advance, the artisan an advocate, the widow or orphan an adviser or protector, each and all sought alike the same exhaustless influence, and rarely missed their purpose.

Industry had already created wealth and generated intelligence amongst the towns of Flanders; their walls gave shelter and encouragement to the growth of a middle class of society, possessed of acuteness to perceive clearly and despise heartily the ignorance and brutality of the lordly possessors of the soil, who sought to press down their new order with a heel of iron.

It was at this juncture Artevelde appeared in the arena, and he it was who first made known to this new class their own vast power, and taught them how to direct it.

Whilst impelled on the one hand by the strong desire to regulate the arbitrary and oppressive exactions, which cramped their energies and held them for ever at the mercy of their despot's caprice; and restrained on the other by their habitual reverence for their feudal princes, Artevelde stepped forth, and in their startled ears pronounced the word "**Resist.**" His eloquence was well seconded by the grasping severity of a needy and extravagant court, until gradually combining their

wealth and intelligence with the energies of a populace jealous of their rights, the merchants and citizens of the cities of Flanders rose upon the bears and butterflies who infested and robbed them, and, thrusting them forth, set modern Europe the first fearful example of a people's strength, and the rottenness of the wooden gods for whom they laboured.

Whilst princes, on their parts, learned a lesson they have not since forgotten or ever ceased to practise, and combining their hosts of slaves, lashed them onward to scare this stranger, Freedom, from the earth, even as in our times of intelligence they have done, and will do, and the brainless slaves so lashed, shouted and went forward to the murderous work which rivetted their own fetters, even as in our time they have done, and will again do in times to come.

After a series of destructive reverses, and successes scarcely less bloody, treaties made and evaded, oaths sworn and broken, Lewis, already twice dethroned, and as often restored,

was again, despite the power of France, thrust forth to a third exile, and from this time the struggle was continued, until the whole power of the state had gradually merged into the hands of the extraordinary man of whom we speak; for the people, although capable when hard spurred, of violent exertion, were not readily taught to think for themselves; the art of government, like all others, must be learned by patient and painful experience, and for this they were allowed neither time nor leisure. To their chief leader, therefore, whose genius outpaced the rude age in which he lived, they gladly resigned the power they had acquired, and from this time forth Jacob Van Artevelde ruled more absolutely over Flanders than born prince had ever done since trade created the sturdy class who overthrew the wall of exclusion, within which nobility sought to hedge its greatness.

But to revert to the boat—on board of this no word was spoken, as with rapid course she moved over the sluggish waters of the canal in the direction of the water-gate before

alluded to ; as this gate was neared it was seen to rise heavily from out the waters, leaving a free passage beneath its arch of ponderous spikes—suddenly the rowers lifted their oars, the helmsman shifted his paddle low on the quarter, and giving the barge a broad sheer-to, skilfully directed her prow through this entrance, and ranged her alongside a small well ordered dock closely walled in, and only connected with the canal by the portcullis, which having been raised to admit, now again fell slowly behind the boat.

The passengers immediately landed, and mounted the steps of this dock, amidst the loud salutations of the retainers in attendance, in which greetings a blunt familiarity might be seen, that accorded but ill with the state of him to whom they were addressed, and who received them in the like spirit, having a word or a nod for each, until, on reaching the stair-head, his eye caught the advancing figure of a man, who appeared the bearer of expected news ; when, stepping forward to meet him,

with an eager look and altered tone, he hurriedly demanded—

“ Now, Clooté, hast been to the gate? this is good speed;—well, didst find Gortz on the watch, and has the knave rider we await, passed on, as I suspect, by the river bank?”

“ I found Gortz alert, as you directed,” replied the man, “ and he says he can answer that no rider has passed, who sought to find you.”

“ The tortoise loiters, then,” muttered Artevelde, in a tone of impatience, “ or has missed the ford at Gavérbuck, and so got drowned, for else he ought to have been here three hours agone; lay on some light-shodden knave or other, Clooté, to see and meet him, and let word be passed to me of his approach.”

The man fell behind, to select a runner from those best fitted to this task, whilst the speaker turned to his plain friend, and familiarly catching his arm, cried—

“ Now, Van Heylen, how fits thine appetite with the near even meal—art prepared to deal

manfully upon old Mechie's *bouchies*, which ordinarily, thou dost so loudly laud?"

"Aye, am I," gravely answered Van Heylen, "and the more, that my breakfast was so hurried by your hot speed, it did me little pleasure, and stood me in less stead; I've feared to open my mouth for the last hour back, lest the wind might fill up my untenanted interior, and master East-wind is but an ill guest in an empty stomach."

"Ha, ha, ha!" merrily laughed Artevelde. "Is it so with thee, friend Jan? yet see here, I might as well have allowed thee free feeding time, since he for whom I hastened proves laggard; but come—enter within the house, and let us see if we cannot now find both time and the wherewithal to make up for the lenten fare of morn."

A flight of some half-dozen steps led them on to a platform, about twenty feet broad, well flagged, bulwarked by a low balustrade, and extending along the whole depth of this, the back front of the large mansion occupied by

Artevelde—immediately facing the steps was the lofty open door, surmounted by a well carved gaily decorated group of the Virgin and Child, backed by evenly rounded silver clouds, out of which peeped sundry heads of oxen, and cherubs with freshly gilded wings, all placed within a curiously wrought, dome-shaped niche, which was flanked on either hand by a balcony rich with carved work and gilding.

Reverently doffing their caps, and raising their eyes towards the holy group above the entrance, the travellers devoutly crossed themselves, one moment paused, and then passed soberly beneath into a spacious hall, extending athwart the building, till intersected by one still larger which ran along the street-front of the house, having an entrance to correspond with the one in the rear, but which, by the numerous and strong fastenings drawn across it, appeared as if seldom opened. Within this hall a table was quickly and plentifully covered by the busy attendants, who served here in prompt and well ordered array.

" And now, Van Heylen," cried the master of this noble mansion, moving towards the table, " sit and eat, and for my feeding heed not, since I shall have small appetite till this laggard, Arlot, be come."

Van Heylen needed no second welcome, but seating himself on one of the benches ranged by the board's edge, he addressed him in silent sorrow to his solitary meal, occasionally pausing in his labour to cast a look, full of pity, upon his host, who continued slowly to pace from one extremity of the vast hall to the other, exchanging now and then a chance word with his busy guest, but with eyes for ever glancing anxiously through the narrow windows, that afforded, on this side of the building, a view of the large square, called the *paverd merkt*, at this moment traversed by hundreds of busy feet; for the workmen were hastening home, to the sound of that welcome peal which proclaimed their labours ended for the day.

Suddenly Artevelde stopped, and bent a piercing glance through the small dim panes,

upon the rise of the bridge, bounding his ken in the front—was it one of his own men whom he beheld hurrying onward, whilst in his rear came one, spurring an already over-ridden horse? Doubtfully, for a moment, did he gaze, then eagerly exclaimed, striking his broad palms together, “ ‘Tis, ‘tis Arlot! and, slowly as fades twilight in the eyes of night-waiting lovers, comes he hitherward;” then, turning to a domestic passing near him, he added, “ send in that rider to my chamber, the moment he’s off horse, and have a lamp ready, for the light grows thick.”

He was leaving the hall with these words, when, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he turned, and, addressing Van Heylen in a whisper, said, “ Leave not the house, Jan, ere I have again speech with thee ; for, if I mistake not, this owlet-winged messenger bears news hither that will rouse eagles.”

“ I will take heed,” answered the unmoved Heylen, nodding over his repast ; whilst Artevelde, passing from this front hall, turned through the other to the right, and entered

within the privacy of what was termed the "*Heers kammer*," or master's room.

This was a small apartment, but richly and fancifully appointed ; here were assembled most of the early attempts at oil colouring, about this period introduced by Van Eyck, the dark and heavy masses of whose pieces singularly contrasted with the showy painting—or rather painting and gilding—of the Italian masters : added to these, scriptural subjects most curiously wrought in choice mosaic, adorned the walls, or occupied stands purposely contrived for their display. Here also a variety of antique vases stood mingled with the crude imitations Artevelde was encouraging his countrymen to attempt, and which, judging by the specimens afforded here, they had done, like very journeymen, lamely, and apparently without any perception of the graceful outline of their models. Mixed with these varied productions of the gentler arts, every where appeared those cruel weapons which, in barbarian hands, had well nigh banished the arts for ever, and even now held them almost strangers amongst men.

Arms of every shape, and of all nations, might here be found, either singly, and ready for instant grasp, or losing their deadly shapes in some grotesque and fanciful arrangement.

The lofty single window that served to light this room looked backward, over the extensive court, and on to the small dock where the travellers had a short time before landed, and within which the barge lately so busily manned, now lay in quiet and well ordered repose.

Hardly had the Ruward flung aside his bonnet, and taken his seat in the ample chair which stood ready by the table, when the door opened, and the belated courier staggered in. His appearance immediately disarmed his master of reproof, for it sufficiently made known that, if the delay had destroyed his lord's ease, at least his own had not been much consulted, for he was obviously ready to sink with overweariness.

"Now, Arlot," demanded Artvelde, "what word sends Sir Arnold de Backqueghen?"

"Sir Arnold," slowly and distinctly answer-

ed the man, “ bade me say that the thrice-baited Bear was assuredly awakening with the approach of summer, and, unless you made better speed, would be up and afoot ere your couples are loosed.”

“ Hah !” ejaculated the questioner, “ thus hot on it ! Well, so much the better ; and my Lord Bishop, what word scends he ?”

“ I have his mind in writing here,” answered the man, thrusting his hand within the lining of his skull-cap, “ and sorely delayed was I whiles he wrought at it.”

“ Nay, I marvel no longer at thy lack-speed an if thou wert forced to tarry the while his Lordship did this precious piece of clerkship !” cried the Heer, continuing, as he took the mission from Arlot, “ would that he had also seen fit to come in person to decipher his strange characters, which, I fear, will pass my scholarship. Well, and the other lords ?”

“ The Baron of Corbie greets you lovingly, and will, he says, be ready at all points ; Sir Eustace Van Bruique and the Seigneur of Falkmont will well consider what you have

frankly offered, and will, at the least, hold them clear in all things prejudicial until you hear from them again, or they of you. The Duke sends you these to be read and replied to with all haste, and so am I quit of my errand."

"And well quit too, Arlot, although something of the latest, but in that thou art excused ; go, get thee food and rest, take this to make merry to-morrow, and tell Backhuisen to hold himself ready to ride on the instant."

The man caught in his cap the coin his master flung to him, gave it a spin above his head, and crying, "Grace and God speed, Heer Jacob," strode bravely from the room, resolute not to postpone till the morrow the use of the means of present enjoyment now in his possession.

Impatiently tearing away the cumbrous fastening of the Prelate's epistle, Artevelde set about the task of deciphering its contents, which he slowly succeeded in accomplishing, although with some difficulty and growing im-

patience ; this impatience was made apparent through certain expressions of fretfulness, which, in disjointed sentences, escaped his lips, as, “ Patience, kind Job !—what means he here ?—a wise cast fool priest—” till in the end he tossed the scrawl from his hand, adding—“ all this ill spent time and labour might have been spared by one plain word thrice repeated, haste, haste, haste ! since all that the priest says, after so much pains taking, goes to that tune, which now swells loud, and is echoed from too many quarters to be longer doubted or disregarded. Now for the Duke, if he confirm these rumours, we must, in good faith, bestir us : ” and so saying, he cut the silken band which encircled the ducal missive, having pended to it a large seal of yellow wax.

As the Ruward read, his blue eye brightened, the colour rushed over his face, and in conclusion, carefully refolding the parchment and placing it within his gown, he raised a small silver whistle to his lip and blew sharply upon it, exclaiming, “ This will do, here's confirmation would silence St. Peter's unbelief ;

now our liege lord, Lewis, lie thou close, for out of this cloud over England will I conjure such a storm as thou shalt find ill to bide, even under the broad wings of France."

A domestic now appeared at the door in answer to his summons. "Send the Heer Van Heylen to me," he said. As the man retired he again unfolded the Duke's letter, ran his eye quickly over it, and again exclaimed aloud, "Here's that shall, without fail, arouse our lion Edward."

## CHAPTER II.

IN a short time after he was summoned, Van Heylen entered, bearing in his quiet look and sober brow small trace of the good cheer he had but lately been so closely engaged with.

“Sir Jan,” began his host, good humouredly addressing him, “sit ye, and mark me well, for I am now about to task thy patience and private friendship for my poor self, as well as thy known zeal in our common cause.”

“Say on, Jacob,” replied Van Heylen, “thou canst scarce bear too heavily on either for my good will to fail thee.”

"I do full credit that, Jan, or I were now silent," exclaimed Artevelde, grasping the old man's bony right hand within both his own ; "and now listen : thou hast seen the goodly vessel which the English captain took from that Genoese pirate, Doria—that which now lies at Sluys?" Van Heylen nodded—the questioner went on : " how should'st thou, Jan, relish a short voyage in that same ship?"

"To say truth," began Jan, after a full minute's pause of deliberation, " methinks that for graye men, and men whose time is on many accounts precious, we have already voyaged far enough and long enough in that pretty bauble ; of the which be it said, thou hast made but an ill bargain, Heer Jacob, seeing that when done with as a plaything it may not be again, without great cost, turned to any profitable use, having now such slender space for stowage, that no——"

" And didst thou think so light of me ?" here interposed Artevelde, impatient of this unusually long speech of his friend's, "as to

deem that I took all these past pains for no other end than mine own whims, or even Bertha's health? Oh! content thee, Jan, I have a far deeper cast to make with this same line. Now, hark thee, it is necessary to our own well being, and, what's far dearer, for the continuance of that freedom we now enjoy within these states of Flanders, that tidings long afloat, but which this hour only has confirmed, should be borne safely and unsuspectedly to England's king. Note this: the very act of a messenger's departing on that course from me, would betray his errand to the watchful birds about. I would, in this extremity trust but myself, or one whose well tried love has proved his part in me—one such there is whom I can reckon on, and thou art he, Van Heylen.

“ To-morrow, then, wilt thou return, by Bruges, to Sluys, where, doubtless, thou wilt find the ship we yesterday parted in the Scheldt; thence sail thou forth, as to a fresh disporting, in company with my daughter;—but having

cleared the harbour, suddenly turn face towards England, and, seeking King Edward, who is now biding at the Tower, with all haste and privacy lay my poor counsel at his princely feet, and do his bidding thence.

“ Our previous cruisings, and my Bertha’s presence, will alike mock suspicion, or serve to lead it off the scent : and, with God’s help, ye may be back ere well missing, or at the worst, such start will thus be gained on those who mine against us, as may dig hollow the ground beneath their feet.”

“ But wherefore all this speed, and to what particular end mine errand ?” demanded Heylen, although with a look and tone but little indicative of great curiosity.

“ Thou shalt learn all that fully on thy return, good Jan,” answered Artevelde ; “ and will, I know, spare me closer question now, since our time is too brief for more than promptest action.”

“ I question thee not, and am even now ready,” firmly said the old man ; “ say thou

but go, and I am gone, for my hand is in thine, and has been there long, and have I not prospered by thy leading?"

Artevelde heartily grasped the proffered hand, and in a low, but impressive tone, made answer.

"Thou dost lean on one, Jan Van Heylen, who of a surety never yet failed friend or enemy, and who, with God's aid, will yet guide thee to higher fortune than ever fell on Flemish cloth-worker before our time, or may again.

"Of this much be sure, there is but one blow more to strike, and we are for ever proof against the tyranny or treason of Count Lewis, or any of his race; the hammer is already poised, thy voyage will overbalance it, and it must fall."

"Let it come down," exclaimed Van Heylen, starting from his seat, and smiting the table with an energy that told of fire within: "down with it, I say again, although I be the first crushed by the fall; we are free men, and so let us live or die."

"There spake forth the heart that bloody

Cassel's lost fight could neither break nor bend," cried Artevelde; "and now friend Jan, get thee to sleep, for I promise full early on the morrow shalt thou be uproused."

"But comest thou not presently to the hall to supper?" demanded Heylen, accompanying his words with a look of unfeigned commiseration, as he beheld his friend once again seat himself, and, drawing closer to the table which was covered with well arranged packets, prepare to write.

"We will breakfast together, Jan," answered Artevelde, continuing his arrangement, "meantime I have that to indite will require a cool head and clear wit, and those subtle qualities rarely abide by me in fellowship with a full belly; so again good night, and rest ye well."

"I find not that for my poor part," retorted the philosopher Jan, moving slowly outwards, "but every man after his own fashion in these matters. I'll sup, and then to bed, so heaven be with you, Heer Jacob."

"I had well nigh forgot to tell you," said

Heylen, quietly closing the half-opened door, “here is the young seigneur of Courtressin, just arrived.”

“Aye, I’m glad on it,” exclaimed the Ruward, starting up; “send him hither. Whence comes he?—hath he said?”

“I spake but two words with him as he got off horse, but I think he told me he was last from Damme.”

“From Damme!” repeated Artevelde; “what doth he ever homeward by that road? it is neither the shortest nor the best. Whilst Bertha was there I guessed his often visits were for her sake, so spake not of the matter, in order best to encourage them: but what the plague wins Philip that way now think ye, Heylen?”

“Nay, I know not,” gravely answered Van Heylen, “except it be that he has gotten used to the road, and now from habit continues to stick by it.”

“By the mass, Jan,” cried Artevelde, shaking his head, “I fear me that same boy, our Philip, is over-fond of new ways, and too curious to be so formal.”

"That too is like enough, and no wonder either," added Heylen, with a significant nod and a cunning smile, "since he comes of one who himself loved not jogging in the old beaten track, else had we men of Flanders still been beasts of burthen, having Count Lewis and his trim courtiers yet spurring hard on our wrung backs."

"Well, well, it is in vain I feel to seek to harness the heart of another after our desired fashion," cried the Ruward, in a thoughtful manner: "but say, is it not most marvellous, Van Heylen, to note this wilful hair-brained boy's utter indifference?—look on Bertha, is she not graced with every charm, which nature in her kindest mood could hang about the most favoured maiden?—is she not gifted with more than a man's wit, and this too, tempered with more than woman's gentleness?—yet does our perverse Philip look with cold eyes upon this mine of joy, and, thinking that it may be safely won, regards it not, nor seeks to make it his?"

"Wherfore judge you thus?" answered

Van Heylen ; “ he is yet too young, too full of boyish spirit, and rude, roving fancies, to have ever dwelt closely on so grave a matter as a wife. Here have I been for thirty years counting the chances, and am not settled yet, yea or nay : besides, this is a match that must be soon or late ; ‘tis a fixed bargain, as I witnessed ; so if you have any doubt, be advised, and delay it no longer, but quickly lay your desires and commands on both, and so ends the matter.”

“ Not so, Van Heylen—it ends not so,” somewhat sadly replied Artevelde ; “ my commands may bring them to the altar, it is true, and the priest may join their hands there ; but, alas ! you know not how vain the task to seek by any ceremony done to draw cold hearts into a fond communion ; and by my hopes, much as I have sought, and dearly as I wish these were made one, it would set heavy on my soul’s last shrift when dying, to feel that I had chained for life, in cursed indifference, two such glowing hearts.”

“ This is a point on which I find not your

usual wisdom," coolly observed Van Heylen ; " all this, if worthy of thought, should have been considered before you made covenant with old Sir Bernard Courtressin;—tut, tut, the maiden's young, the boy still younger—let them be shortly wed, since wedded they must be, before the eyes of either be tainted by any other fancy ; and my word on't, they turn out in time a right loving pair."

" Perhaps !" cried Artevelde, little heedful at the moment, of the speaker ; " bid Philip to come hither to me, and so, once more, good night."

" Aye, what fair destiny may not fancy mar ?" continued the Ruward, as Van Heylen leisurely departed. " Here be this pair now, drawn by fortune together, well matched, and having all worldly things agreeing to their mutual happiness, yet they regard not each other, 'tis plain, as I would fain see them, and on a constrained nearer view, may, perchance, hate, or, what is yet worse, be indifferent. They are like two beauteous birds, bred up in neighbour cages, yet never seeking to mate to-

gether, simply because the doors have been left open to their loves; yet, had this same pair but jostled in the open sky together, 'tis like enough they would have compassed the wide earth to have built their common nest in company—but patience, patience, since youth and love are both blind and wayward, and seldom follow in the track where wisdom beckons."

The sudden entrance of the object of his care here interrupted the Ruward's soliloquy on the blind god's wilfulness. Turning towards Philip de Courtressin, where he had flung himself into a seat by the opposite side of the table, the light resting full on his pale handsome face, just tinged with the glow of recent exertion, his hair of glossy black falling in thick masses down his neck, the eye of Artevelde became filled with an expression wherein shone mingled both pride and tenderness, in a degree but seldom witnessed in the glance of a guardian upon a truant ward.

The mutual "good even" having been exchanged, "You demanded my presence here, sir?"

"I sought but to learn, Philip, where you rested by the way here," replied the Ruward, in a voice unconsciously subdued and tender; "and to enquire what route ye took, since you arrived not before us, who came further and voyaged wide about?"

"I rode round by way of Damme," carelessly answered the youth, "and halted there last night, with Agos d'Oeskirk, to prove the breed and condition of two gestrills he's manning for me."

"And no less, I surmise, to look upon the convent of our Layde, where thou wert wont so often to visit our fair Bertha;—was't not as I have guessed?" demanded Artevelde, with a sly air, wherein a touch of anxiety was also conspicuous.

"I surely did look on that same convent, and into it too, as far as the closed grate would let me," answered Philip, for a moment hesitating, "but——"

"But no longer found her you were wont to see there?" continued Artevelde, concluding the sentence.

"Alas! no, sir, why should I conceal it, you have there guessed rightly; the sweet bird was flown, but whither, I could learn nothing."

"How, Philip?" ejaculated Artevelde, with an air of surprise, more affected than real, "your cousin Bertha you well knew would be in Sluys."

"In truth, sir, I spoke not of her," frankly replied Philip, "but, now you mind me, I take shame that I have not, ere this, since I know that she hath been ill and weak. I pray you tell me, sir, how fares it with her, is she yet restored? though I cannot think that you acted over wisely in sending her to win strength in the salt breeze of the sea, and thence ever and anon land her at Sluys, where she'll have luck an she escape the ague, which there takes up permanent abode."

"Go-to, saucy boy," laughingly cried the Ruward, half vexed, yet amused by the light speech of the spoiled youth; "thou dost well to impeach my wisdom, founded as it is on the

advice of our most skilful leach. Bertha, thanks be to our Ladye, is much mended by the change, and it would, methinks, be but gracious in thee, Philip, to ride thither on the morrow, in company with Van Heylen, who hastens homeward—the maiden, doubtless, would esteem thy courtesy."

"Cry a mercy, fair, kind guardian; think not, I pray, to prescribe Sluys to me, since I have no weakness, and love not an ague-fit; although," he added, in a gentler tone, "I would ride a day to meet Bertha too, and were it to Bruges, Mons, Brussels, or——"

"Or *Damme!*!" interposed the Ruward.

"Aye, as you say, or *Damme!*," continued Philip, nothing startled by the peculiar emphasis laid on the interruption; "I would willingly obey your desire, but, as it is, must content me, by your leave, with loading Jan Van Heylen's sturdy gelding with as many of my best wishes as the beast can bear, in addition to his accustomed burthen."

"But now tell me, Philip," enquired the

Ruward, with a ~~loose~~ air, “ who is this *she* you sought to win a sight of at the convent of our Ladye de Damme ? ”

“ Aye, now you touch me near,” cried the youth, the colour coming fresher on his cheek, “ and I'll give you, sir, the two brindled hounds you so prize, besides the best hawk in all Flanders, if you will tell me so much ; since, by my troth, I know not rightly, only that I swear she is fairer than any angel I ever saw in my sweetest dream.”

“ Tut, tut, boy ! this is loose talk only ; thou canst tell if the wench be dark or fair, short or tall, surely. Is she more beautiful in feature, or more noble in stature, than our Bertha is ? Canst answer that ? ” humourously cried Artevelde.

“ I know not that I can answer this,” replied the youth, musing, “ since, never before have I chanced think of them together ; as for Bertha, she might be a queen, and a man would proudly do her liege homage, and, if needs be, die in her cause : but she of whom I spake might be a man's ladye-love, in whose

smile only, one could live, and in whose absence surely die."

"Well, boy, thou art a poet, I see, and we shall have thee, doubtless, rhyming, with the Italian soon," cried Artevelde, affecting to laugh at the ardent picture thus drawn by the enthusiastic youth. "But thou art welcome home, by any route—get thee now to supper, and to bed, for to-morrow I must have thee early in saddle, to do a courtly errand for me, as far as Ypres," adding, fervently, as he placed his hands upon the youth's head, "now Heaven guard thee!—and good night."

"Give you good night, sir," replied Philip, bowing low, as he turned, yawning, to the door; "and, if you would have me up early, I pray you to mind one of your varlets to call me; for I am sore wearied to-night, and shall, I know, sleep else like an over run hound."

The youth stepped into the hall, whispering audibly to himself, as he closed the door, "Still is my secret safe, I find; and yet for that, am I scarce inclined to thank fortune;

even now, I had nearly swallowed back the lie, and honestly told the truth to the Ruward, which soon or late must be known. What has this hatred grown between him and my cousin of Rerefonde, to do with my happiness? let them hate on, I love young Alzire; aye, and will wed her too, and no other; so to supper and to sleep, that I may at least dream of that time."

"'Tis an ingenuous youth," exclaimed Artevelde, musing for a few minutes, after the departure of his ward, "and has in him, despite this light and fickle humour, the germ of a brave manhood. It is full time he were abroad, and loose upon a wider field, and, my present great aim accomplished, I will find him such, under the guidance of the noble Edward, from whose love I may well claim so much, when he shall know how nearly it affects my quiet. Meantime, 'tis a dear price I pay for that boy's happiness, to be so coldly looked upon, and addressed for ever with such bare ceremony, by one who—but regret is idle now, and I must patiently play out the game."

Betaking him to the newly received dis-

patches, the Ruward once again, and with greater attention, perused them carefully, as it seemed comparing each with such as he had formerly received on the same subject; and this portion of his labour ended, he next composed him to prepare the necessary credentials for the maiden's embassy to Edward of England. .

## CHAPTER III.

HERE, in order to enable the reader clearly to comprehend the present views of Van Artevelde, together with the relative condition of the men and countries we purpose dealing with, it becomes necessary to take a brief retrospective review of the events of the last few busy years immediately preceding the date of our story, beginning with the truce of Tournay.

This truce then was projected and brought about through the pious intercession of the Countess Joan of Hainault, who, anxious to disembarrass her brother, Philip of France,

without periling his crown in the chance of a pitched fight with the English king, which must, of necessity, have followed the fall of Tournay ; or from being, as more gallant historians relate, inspired with the nobler spirit of active benevolence, and actuated by a merciful desire to stay the horrors of a struggle which became each day more sanguinary, stepped forth from the quiet of a cloister into the tumult of a leaguer ; boldly offered herself as mediatrix between the contending monarchs, and, although receiving but little avowed encouragement from either, so vigorously and indefatigably pressed her point, that she at length carried it in triumph, despite of open hostility or covert intrigue.

Throughout the whole negociation the Countess met with no more determined opponent than Jacob Van Artevelde, nor with one so difficult to encounter, his heart was in fact fixed upon restoring the rich city of Tournay to the states he governed ; for this disposition of it, when taken, he held the pledge of King Edward : his own personal exertions in further-

ance of this end had been unremitting, and to be thus baffled of the bird just fluttering within his reach, was a source of proportionate vexation and disappointment.

The mutual dislike, which was naturally attendant upon their opposition, was soon ripened into hatred by the haughty bearing of the Countess, who, although fully possessed of the real power of the "Prince Merchant," and a constant witness of the deference which the greatest and wisest paid to his high station and talent, could not restrain her lofty disdain of his interference to a contemptuous silence, but occasionally indulged in loud invective or reproof, which Artevelde was not slow in resenting with sarcasm, more cutting from the extreme indifference with which it was conveyed, and the unruffled demeanour he maintained under her fiery humours.

It required at length all the influence of the noble Commissioners to induce the proud sister of Philip to abide, in quiet, even the appearance of the Ghent Brewster, as she termed Artevelde, at the discussions for the truce, in

which his country was, truly, the most interested party ; nor, to the last, could she be restrained from venting her impatience, in language more energetic than was becoming in one devoted to religion, or was in consonance with the humility its precepts inculcate.

On one occasion the representatives of the contracting parties were assembled in the chapel of Esplotin, to affix their seals to the terms all but agreed upon, when the active mind of the Flemish demagogue arrested the hands of his allies, by making manifest, with a clear sightedness the smooth ingenuity of the French politicians could neither baffle nor mislead, the great advantages conceded to Philip, by the existing terms of the treaty. So eloquently did he argue the impolicy of skimming over the objectionable articles, or too hastily revising them, as was recommended by those impatient for the conclusion of the truce, that, in the end, Edward's Commissioners, the Bishop of Lincoln and the Duke of Brabant, became startled at their own re-

sponsibility, and hastily broke up a conference which was expected to have proved conclusive, declaring themselves resolute to abide further advice from their royal master, before proceeding to set their seals to terms which one so clear-sighted had so loudly impeached.

The anger of the Countess knew no bounds, as she thus beheld her triumph deferred, if not for ever made void, at the very moment when she imagined all objections surmounted.

“What!” exclaimed the passionate woman, as, in consequence of this resolve, the assembly rose once more to separate, “must it really be so? and have the proud nobles of England, France, and Brabant been assembled here only to be schooled, in points of honour and policy, and so dismissed, to con the lesson given by a brawling Flanders Brewer? What! and is the blood of princes to be blown hot or cold by the rank breath of a bread and cheese boor, such as this prating trickster here?

“Ho! Mother of God, but these be in sooth wild fangled days, when in kings’ councils

churls' beards wag fastest, and when in kings' battles, the trumpets of chivalry but echo the click of the weaver's shuttle."

A large body of men, chiefly artisans of this craft, had been led by Artevelde to assist at the siege; and most true it was, that, in the many desperate assaults made against the walls of Tournay, no knightly cognizance had been seen more forward in the press, than the shuttle of the stout weavers of Ghent.

Artevelde had disdained any immediate re-tort to this last intemperate sally of the proud dame of Hainault; but it fell on a retentive ear; and when, in despite of these temporary checks, the zeal of the Countess, aided by the embarrassments of the principals, caused the truce to be proclaimed, and Tournay abandoned, then he openly made a vow, at parting, even in the ear of the startled Joan, that, before five years were past, the breath of the Flemish Brewster should conjure up a gale of sufficient power to shake the crown on her brother's head, and blow a blight over France,

that should leave her soil to barrenness for a hundred years to come.

The intemperate words of a petulant woman were soon forgotten, but years rolled by only to behold this purpose of Artevelde acquire increased determination, but in truth, his policy was too deep seated, to need the spur of private spleen to quicken it.

In the third year after the truce arose the disputes between Charles de Blois and Philip de Montfort, for possession of Bretagne, and Edward roused himself, to secure so direct a road into the very heart of France. The hopes of Artevelde were now it seemed fairly about to be fulfilled, and a quarrel generated, which promised to arm all Europe on one side or other ; but, contrary to these prognostics, the war languished even from the commencement. The English churchmen were unfriends with their sovereign, and once he was embarked, the promised supplies proved but scanty, and came but slowly in, until, at Vannes, Edward found himself so ill at ease, as to once more hearken to a truce, the which, leaving to

unwelcome to, at least, a very large and a very influential party in England.

At the first hint, the Duke had lent a greedy ear to the project of his father. Some of the most confidential of his great vassals were also at distance probed, and were found anything but adverse to an attempt which their ancestors had proved so easy of execution, and from the success of which they had reaped such large advantage.

Amongst those mercenary nobles also, whom Edward retained at his court, proud of their personal prowess, and flattered by their professions of devotion to his service, many were found base enough to follow an example, but too prevalent amongst the boasted chivalry of the age, and by the promise of larger hire, were bought to betray the condition, and prompt the invasion of the country, to whose sovereign they were beholden for their honourable keeping.

This plot, then, in fact, although by no means ripe, was at one time a growing plot—

a good plot—and had a face sufficiently alarming, when Artevelde, whose command of money gave him command of men, which his indefatigable spirit did not neglect, was put, by some of his spies, in possession of the high emprise in contemplation.

Once having hold of the clue, he spared no pains-taking to come at the designs of France ; and although his sagacity early assured him there was but little chance of the ill-assorted mass taking any shape, unless moulded in abler hands than those of Robert of Normandy, he nevertheless perceived he was possessed of ample evidence of the gathering of a tempest, the very shadow of which was dark enough to induce Edward to hearken to his council; and first healing by a few politic concessions the existing breaches with his clergy, obtain from them in return the means of suddenly anticipating the blow meditated by his tardy foes, land an army in Normandy, and there employ the Duke's mettle in the defence of his own hearth, instead of abiding, with a divided power, his meditated attack on England.

In aid of this plot to keep awake the fears of Edward, Artevelde had prepared a new prize to stir his ambition; this was nothing less than the rich sovereignty of Flanders itself, which he purposed should now be formally and for ever wrested from Count Lewis, and the allegiance of the several towns won in favour of the Black Prince, Edward's eldest son.

The rightful lord, indeed, at present, held but a barren sceptre in his hand, and had, in fact, long ceased to possess any authority in the country; but, exiled by his subjects, continued at Ruremonde, watching, though almost hopelessly, for any chance which might enable him to make a new venture for the recovery of his sovereignty. Many of the chief nobility were also exiled; some through choice, and others because their influence was feared or their fealty doubted by the ruling power,—these persons were congregated in considerable numbers at St. Omers and at Granville, where they were recognized by the French, as "*les Avolez,*" or "the despoiled," in consequence of its being known that Artevelde had seized on

the revenues of all who were absent either through constraint or choice, one half of which he applied to the uses of the state, whilst the other was allowed for the decent maintenance, according to their several degrees, of the families or dependants of the banished.

To counteract the designs constantly agitated against him by these Seigneurs, and others, who, with less to complain of, yet writhed indignant beneath his vulgar rule, and sighed for the possession of their ancient authority and licence, Artevelde had contrived a system of espionage of the most perfect kind.

Nothing inspired more awe of his power than the facility with which he gained intelligence of all that passed far and near, and the apparent prescience with which this foreknowledge invested his every movement.

A whisper of sedition against his government spoken in Ypres or Bruges, was replied to in thunder from Ghent, before yet the plotters had trusted it to open day, and the deepest laid plans of Lewis were hitherto baffled and counteracted, even within the walls of Ruremonde.

The uncontrolled command of means possessed by Artevelde, and his liberal dispensation of them, insured his being well served by his spies of all ranks, whilst his habits of business enabled him to regulate their proceedings so as to form a system far above the penetration or imitation of the ignorant court against which he warred.

To the means we have described he was alone indebted for his early knowledge of Philip's plot against the crown of his ally, or, as he should more properly be styled, his friend Edward of England; and through the like sources he was also made perfectly aware that Lewis had yet many friends and personal well-wishers, even in those towns most clamorous for freedom, and whose interests were naturally opposed to his return, having most to dread from his resentment, the recollection of past affronts having ever been found to outweigh with princes the gratitude for present favours. Yet, despite the knowledge of this feeling, which, hydra like, lifted its many heads against his purpose of placing the coronet of Flanders upon

the brow of an English prince, he shrunk not from his determined purpose, but on the contrary resolved, if he found Edward warm to the project, to seize the present occasion, boldly at once avow his meditated change, and make the first hint of his attempt play herald to its success.

Thus matters stood at the opening of our tale, and thus have we, briefly as might be, put our readers in possession of the politic motives which influenced the present proceedings of the Heer Jacob Van Artevelde.

The sagacity which taught this personage the use of regular and well-organized information, at a period when news travelled but limpingly by the ordinary channels, also made him aware of the necessity of precaution, where it was needful his own movements should leave no trace behind. He well knew the character of some of the German knights, who—despite the revocation of the vicarship of the empire, which had been formally promulgated by the emperor upon his making peace with Philip—yet continued their service to Edward. Of these,

some, he knew, were already in the pay, or making terms with France, whilst others were equally well disposed to change sides at any moment most promising for their own interests.

Thus circumstanced and informed, to guard against the chance of the grand political blow he meditated being in the remotest degree suspected, or counteracted by the plots he knew to be in present agitation for the restoration of Count Lewis, was one great principle of its ultimate success; and in order to effect this, he arranged the following precautions.

An English cruiser, under the flag of Bretagne, had fallen in with and captured a beautiful galley belonging to the Admiral Anthony Doria, which had been separated from his fleet in a gale. This vessel, brought into the port of Sluys, and there sold for the benefit of her captors, became the property of Artevelde, who after a time refitted it with much elegance, enlarging its accommodations, and giving out that it was intended for his own pleasure, he, during the month of May, oftentimes repaired

on board, left Sluys, and braving the breeze of the North Sea, sailed up the Scheldt in company with his fair kinswoman, or, as she was more commonly termed, his daughter Bertha, for whose health such recreation had been loudly prescribed. Sometimes too, would this young maiden, even in her father's absence, venture out under the skilful pilotage of an old sea captain of Artevelde's, named Peter Van der Oom, attended only by the Heer Van Heylen, who has been already introduced as the friend and confidant of her father; and who, be it farther told, was a merchant and cloth-worker, established at Sluys, very wealthy, resolute to the death against the rule of the Flemish aristocracy, but devoted to the Ruward, and yielding cheerful obedience to his slightest will.

As the weather chanced to prove favourable, so from time to time was this disporting continued, and it was after one of these excursions that Artevelde, leaving his daughter on board, with directions to sail back to Sluys, quitted the bark within the waters of the Scheldt,

and pursuing his way in the row-barge, arrived as has already been shewn, to meet the messenger whose tidings consummated his resolves.

It was on the afternoon of the day following that which saw him receive his instructions from the Ruward, that Van Heylen quietly paced the well-shaped ~~shy~~ roadster under him, over the outer drawbridge which crossed the great sluice connecting the deep ditches of the well fortified port, with the head of this artificial inlet, leading from the sea. Pausing before he entered beneath the deep archway of the town gate, he cast his eyes searchingly leftward down the course of the tortuous sluice, and suddenly fixed them upon a flag, which fluttered from a slender mast, high over a distant embankment, whilst the hull it sprung from lay hidden from sight.

"She is there then," whispered Van Heylen to himself—"and her broad pennon points toward the land we must seek—our Lady of Ardembourg be praised—for 'tis a comforting sign. Holy Virgin, but continue then thy gentle breathings in the same course for two score hours, and I vow to raise over thy altar a ban-

ner of velvet of Genours, thrice piled, and passamented with thy ever blessed image, cunningly wrought in gold, bearing a galley on thy left hand, and thy holy church of Ardembourg on the right."

Reverentially lifting his bonnet from his head, he crossed his brow in ratification of this inwardly vowed compact: then passing onward, entered within the gate—he there dismounted, and resigning his beast's bridle into one of the many ready hands stretched out to receive it, courteously abided to receive and return the welcomes of his friends and gossips, whilst in company they gravely paced towards his abode, answering as he best might, the various demands made on him for news from Ghent and Bruges.

Having by degrees disposed of these queries, "Tell me I pray you," he in turn demanded, "hath the young vrow Bertha Van Artevelde passed within the walls since her return landward, or abides she yet on board of the good ship, which, if I saw truly, now lies below?"

"The galley came up with the last tide,"

answered a sea-faring burgher, “ and the maiden passed on to thy house hardly an hour agone, in company with Van der Oom.”

“ Tarries the fair daughter of the Ruward much longer amongst us, knowest thou, Heylen ?” was here eagerly asked by three or four of the younger citizens.

“ Aye truly, so I hope, and for aught I know,” replied Van Heylen, “ since the blessed intercession of our Lady of Ardembourg has caused these watery breezes to work great changes in her health ; and though I would shame to say, I weary of the company of the Heer Jacob’s daughter, yet could I wish the necessity for these daily sailings was abated, both in consideration of the dear maiden’s health and mine own comfort ; for to speak truly, I love not sporting with the winds and waters, and could better content me to abide the return of health upon the shore, than venture life to meet it on the sea.”

“ Give up this office then, good Jan, and appoint me thy substitute, whilst thou takest thine ease at home,” cried a brisk squire of

Zealand, who was in command of the guard on duty at the gate—"I love not the sea more than thyself, but, by St. Peter! I'd sail to Spain and back to have such precious lading entrusted to my keeping."

"Ha, ha! Master Franz de Ban," good humouredly replied Van Heylen, extending his hand to the gay speaker, "well, and soldierly offered youngster; but who would be thy surety for such a cargo's safe keeping, an I were inclined to trust thee with my charge?"

"Nay an ye speak of *trusting*, I know not," answered the young soldier, casting a sly look on the grave faces about him—"though many here have taken my word for a trifle; unless thou wilt be my warrant thyself, since we have been longest acquaint, and thou best knowest my nature's honesty."

"I do," replied Van Heylen, "and can speak fairly to't, so far as a score of nobles, a harness of mail, a livery of broad cloth, or a good horse, goes; but in the matter of a wench or a hawk, I must refer me to the English knight, Hardy Vaux, from whom, as I have heard say,

thou didst at one stroke run away with a French demoiselle and an Irish ganner."

" Nay thou art ill informed in that matter," returned de Ban, nothing abashed by the accusation so gravely made. " I ran not away with them, but they with me ; and in truth it was a trick they were bred to both, for in six months after, the wench took a wrong turn in the road between Bruges and Damme, and mounted on my best pacing palfrey galloped after a Brabant squire ; and the hawk being soon after unhooded at a Dutch heron, proved as deaf to the lure as the demoiselle, and fairly raked away over the Scheldt, forgetting ever to fly back : so impeach not my honesty, -I pray you, only the wantonness of these creatures' nature. But good even to you, Master Heylen, I'll back to my guard, for I see your memory is too good for me to mend my chance."

So saying, young Franz de Ban turned laughingly away from Van Heylen's door, at which they were arrived ; and after a few more minutes passed in idle chat, the rest of the party, one by one, followed his example, when

our traveller entered his hall, and having, after his constant fashion, first partaken of the meal prepared for him, in company with his aged sister and the adopted daughter of the Ruward, he next proceeded confidentially to inform the fair Bertha of their sudden voyage—with all the bearings of which she was already better acquainted than himself—and giving Peter Van der Oom instructions to have all ready to weigh anchor with the morning's tide, recommended the young ambassadress to repair to bed, that she might, as he said, be the better able to fulfill healthfully the instructions of the Ruward ; a piece of advice which he followed in his own person as soon as he had made some needful arrangements with his maiden sister, without however hinting to her the lengthened nature of the coming voyage.

At an early hour next morning, the Heer Van Heylen and his fair charge presented themselves before the gate, we have before noticed, as the one by which the former personage had entered on the preceding even-

ing. Here they were received by our young Esquire, de Ban, and by him escorted, bonnet in hand, to the utmost limit of his guard. The bold swagger with which he had a few hours before tendered before Van Heylen his service, was exchanged now for the subdued air and soft tones of an expectant courtier, as at a becoming distance he walked by the side of the Ruward's daughter, and was made too happy for the day, when at parting the young maiden spoke her thanks to him in return for his thrice uttered wishes for her pleasure and safety.

They had no sooner gained the galley, than she got under weigh, and an hour's further lapse beheld her clear of the long sluice, just dashing with her lofty prow into the dark waves of the North Sea. It was at this moment that Van Heylen summoned his friend, Peter Van der Oom, to where he sat, in the outer cabin, beneath the poop-deck, tranquilly discussing his morning meal—for he was, when able, ever extremely regular in such divisions of time—he

first desired the old sailor to drink with him in a cup of sweet Gascoyne to their good voyage ; and this ceremony past, he next demanded, “ How sits the wind, good master Peter ? ”

“ About east and south away ; that is, it blows as right as may be between the spire of Ardembourg and the tower of Saint Anne’s,” replied Peter, being as technically minute as the want of the compass would permit.

“ Tush, Peter, what know I of Ardembourg spire, or the tower of Saint Anne’s ? Thou mayest as well bid me now lay my finger between the spire of Nôtre-dame, at Bruges, and the tower of St. John’s. Answer me ; blows this same wind fair for England ? ”

“ Right for the Thames’ mouth,” laconically answered Van der Oom.

“ Good ; then do thou sail straightway down the throat of that same river’s mouth ; for such are the orders of thy master, as thou mayst herein read, under his own hand.”

Peter stared with astonishment from the speaker to the tendered order ; but being much too aristocratic to benefit by a closer inspection

of the document, touched it not, receiving a confirmation much more satisfactory from the lips of his young mistress, Bertha.

Himself a man of few words, and knowing too much of him he served to continue long surprised at this unexpected order, Peter simply replied, with a “ ‘Tis good ;” again mounted to his deck, coolly looked into the wind’s eye, ordered the helm to be put up, passed the word to square away the yards, trimmed each sail with a sailor’s exactitude, so as to lose no breath of ‘vantage, and, this done, shaped a true course for England, whilst the gallant galley of Genoa, as if endowed with a consciousness of the lovely freight she bore, and the importance of the mission on which she sailed, bounded over the pale green waves, like a hound newly slipped.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE "*Morning Star*," for so was the Genoese prize now named, made a quick run, and on the afternoon of the following day was, with a fair breeze, stealing over the smooth waters of old Thames, just stemming the force of the last quarter of the ebb-tide, something west of the high land off Eardly, when a large row-boat, which the crew of the galley had for some time observed endeavouring to make way along shore, taking advantage of a turn, that compelled the "*Morning Star*" to make a short board, suddenly pulled up alongside, and hooking on by the after channels, demanded, some-

what peremptorily, to be allowed a tow-line until such time as the tide of flood should make.

This demand Peter Van der Oom at once and as unceremoniously refused, and would further have compelled the stranger boat presently to shovē off, despite the loud asseverations of the crew that “ they were on the King’s service;” but that Bertha, partly on that hearing, and more because the hot and exhausted condition of the rowers moved her woman’s pity, gently reproved her captain’s churlishness, and desired that the boat might be taken in tow whilst the tide continued adverse to its progress.

On hearing these words the seeming superior of the party, who had hitherto spoken without moving from the seat he occupied in the stern of the boat, now promptly rose, and respectfully doffing his bonnet, in courtly terms gave many thanks to the ladye for her kindness ; meantime a line being quickly passed from the ship’s quarter and made fast round one of the fore thwarts of the boat, this was gradually

allowed to drop to a proper distance astern. The speaker resumed his cloak and his seat, the weary rowers, first snugly shipping their oars, betook them to such attitudes of repose as the narrow space allowed, and the breeze freshening at the same time, even the brow of Peter Van der Oom brightened, as casting a glance over his taffrail, he marked the boat swinging lightly with a taut line in the foamy wake of the flying "Morning Star."

"Didst thou see the face of the maiden who stood our friend in this matter?" enquired Conrade Stetten—the person who had thanked Bertha so courteously—of his junior comrade, Guy d'Aurai, who shared with him the stern-sheets of the boat.

"Aye, did I that," replied Guy, "and with no small marvel; for, if my sight forgets not its archery, it was that of the fair daughter no less, of the Prince beer-brewster of Ghent; her whom we saw that time Sir Alaine rode in a quaint disguise to visit our young fair mistress at the convent of our Lady Agnes de Damme."

"Thou art right in thy guess, and no great

praise to thy sight or thy wit either, d'Aurai,  
since yon is a face once seen not easily for-  
gotten : but that bolt sped, tell me, did thine  
archer-eye recognize as well, the tall spare man  
in grey, who stood so soberly by her side the  
while she spoke, and whose face you may even  
now see, where he sits looking so grim over the  
poop railing—canst thou as readily win from  
thy wit who he is ? ”

“ No marry, that can I not, unless I were to  
say at a guess 'tis Artevelde himself.”

“ Nay, now, Guy, you throw bolt from a  
wetted string, to light so short o' the mark.  
Artevelde, although I love him not, has a front  
of another fashion from him of the grey gown  
there; and, were his breeding unknown, might  
well pass to the eye for the slip of a true  
prince. 'Tis plain thou hast not seen, or, see-  
ing, hast not noted him of Ghent.”

“ Truth to say,” replied Guy, “ I saw him  
but once, some five years agone, when he lay  
with his weavers before Tournay, the time I  
came first to take service with Sir Alaine as a  
page; but on that day he was armed, and rode

in company with a crowd of knights and nobles, amongst whom I but noted—for I was modest then, and seldom raised mine eyes to the faces of mine elders—that he seemed a good tall man.”

“Aye sooth is he, tall enough; but hadst thou not then been blinded by thy *modesty*, the which, bless the saints, has long ceased to injure thine eyesight, thou mightest have also noted that he had a breadth and moulding somewhat different from that sapless two-yard cloth measure above there, who is, nevertheless, be it known, a piece and parcel of the arch mischief-maker, one of the limbs which this king-colin puts forth on all sides, for guard, or assault, as may be, like the hundred-handed giant of the faery tale who was slain in ope lists by the thrice valiant Sir Hercules Greece—hark thee, Guy, that is Jan V Heylen, an old associate and chief counsellor Artevelde’s, who swims here against tide on fool’s errand, be persuaded.”

“Nay, cousin Conrade, be not perplexed; can be no matter of such over deep policy

since there is a woman in company ; " observed d'Aurai, laughing heartily at his own commonplace conceit.

" Tush, man," replied Conrade; " thou but shewest thine own shallowness to say so silly a thing, or laugh at it being said : they who would not be closely marked, oft move in the broadest sun-light, and by the fairest means are ofttimes wrought the wildest mischiefs.

" List ye here, Guy ; the maiden is not surely pressed into this strange harbourage through stress of weather, since there has not been for many days back wind enough a-stir to ruffle a swan-pool—she comes not for state, since she is not attended or encountered as she would be were such her errand ; nor does she journey for pleasure only, for if she did would she not the rather have landed at Harwich, or here below at Rochester, than have abided on board to tide it thus along the aguish borders of these swamps of Essex, when a pleasant ride through the fairest country in all England would have brought her to her journey's end, and in less time too."

"Thou speakest as one of the seven wise men," cried the light hearted Guy, in reply to his keener sighted comrade: "and now thou hast so well defined the things which have not brought this fair demoiselle hitherward, canst thou say as readily what thing hath?"

"No, faith," answered Conrade, "that remains yet to be discovered; and see you where, as I speak even, the road opens before our desire, for behold yonder surly skipper is hailing us to close in with him." Conrade now stood up, rousing the men, with "haul-to, bullies;" and at the same time, raising his hand in reply to a signal for them to near, made from the poop of the galley by Van der Oom, in person.

This intimation was quickly obeyed, and as soon as the boat was again alongside, Van Heylen, leaning over the quarter, kindly inquired whether the strangers would not mount into the ship and partake of some refreshment.

"Most willingly, and thank ye too," replied Stetten, aloud in the frankest possible tone; then bending as if to arrange his cloak, he

suddenly whispered in the ear of the less crafty d'Aurai, “ Be not thou startled, Guy, at ought I advance here for truth, but keep close tongue, or say only with me.”

The moving cause to this act of courtesy on the part of Van Heylen, arose out of the circumstance of the boat's being recognized by the river-pilot, as belonging to the Tower, the men wearing the royal badge ; and the further assertion of this man, that the two persons occupying the stern, were esquires of the King—numbers of the court gallants having, as he said, gone down the river a few days previous, to bid adieu to Sir Walter Manny, and a gay company, who were proceeding to take ship, in order to join the Earl of Derby's army, in Guienne.

From the same veracious source, Van Heylen had also learned that King Edward was not, as he expected, residing at the Tower or at Lambeth, but at his palace at Kennington, where, surrounded by the nobles of the land and many foreign knights, he was busied in great preparations for a solemn festival, which was to

commence there upon the morrow, in honour of Derby's great victory gained at Auberoche.

Not a little did this knowledge disconcert Van Heylen, for although he well knew he should experience small difficulty in gaining the royal ear, were it once known whose envoy he came, yet remembering the cautions of Artevelde, he shrunk from the publicity which must attend his open approach at such a time, when doubtless there would be many present, to whom he must be known, and by whom he might be recognized, a chance which would sort but ill with the absolute secrecy imposed by his instructions.

After therefore laying these facts, together with his fears, before his fair colleague, and finding her perfectly agreed with him upon the necessity of avoiding publicity as much as was possible, consistent with prompt execution of their mission, he resolved to have some parley with these two esquires, in order, cunningly, to sound their capacity, learn their situation and so gather whether or no they might be used with advantage.

It was to this end then, Peter Van der Oom was directed to hail the boat, and with these views Van Heylen now met his guests at the gangway, and requested them to enter beneath the poop, and partake of such fare as his poor ship afforded.

Dried and salted meats, slices of wheaten bread thrice baked, with the cheese and butter of Zealand, and the good beer of Ghent, were in abundance laid upon the board; and whilst the two hungry soldiers did these viands ample justice, and ate with lusty and long-abiding appetite, with many and indirect attacks did Van Heylen seek to learn the names and business of his guests; but all these covert attempts were but made in vain, not that the persons he addressed were either sulky or silent; on the contrary, he had information most abundant on all points, save only upon those he really aimed at.

Truth is, that in Conrade Stetten he met with one far more than his match for cunning, and Guy d'Aurai, although himself no witch, was too much on the alert to mar any game of

his comrades, simply because it chanced to be beyond his foresight: he therefore also played his part with good skill, and together they ate and drank, and gossipped lightly and heedlessly in appearance, until after some time thus pleasantly passed, they were informed that the Tower was close on board.

On this being announced by one of their crew, the guests of the "Morning Star" rose to depart, and now was come the very moment of decision, since no other course remained.

"May I," demanded Van Heylen, as they prepared to go forth, "May I ask of my friends their names, who have been so ill entertained on board of this poor ship?"

"Freely," replied Conrade, without a second's hesitation. "I am called *Peter la Foret*, and my young comrade here *Aumauri de Burgo*. I am Norman, and he no further Saxon, indeed, than being born in a sty may make a man a hog, having no affinity in blood to the swine English."

"Nay, the young gentleman hath no need to

blush for his birthplace," cried Van Heylen, seeing d'Aurai colour up as if about to speak, "since 'tis the blood we boast, and not the air we breathe, puts wit in the head and mettle in the heart; nor do I find, in faith, that the island-born Normans have in aught degenerated from their noble ancestry."

Having thus soothed the feelings of the young esquire to sit patiently under the stigma of English birth—for, strange as it may now appear, to be in those days called English was, in the ear of a Norman gentleman, a term of reproach nearly as hateful as that of Jew—Van Heylen next demanded—

"And are ye both of the court, may I be free to ask?"

"We are both sworn servants and liege followers of the thrice noble the Earl of Derby."

"The Earl of Derby!" echoed Van Heylen.

Conrade gravely nodded a confirmation, whilst d'Aurai turned hastily aside to re-compose his features, utterly confounded by this last round lie, so glibly uttered by Stetten.

"Tell me, sirs, I pray you," continued Van Heylen, with increasing interest, "is not the Earl, your master, cousin to King Edward?"

"Aye, truly is he," answered the unblushing Conrade, with an air of openness and simplicity that might have defied the eyes of Argus.

"And where is now the noble Earl?"

"At Kennington Palace, with the King and court."

"Is he not, then, with the English forces in Guienne?"

"Last even brought him to the King's presence, to be himself the herald of the great victory won under the wall of Auberoche, the which hath so scattered the French that we may go play these next two months," answered Stetten.

"The saints be praised!" exclaimed the old man: then checking his roused enthusiasm, after a moment's thought he went on, wholly beaten from his guard by this good news, and the apparent frankness of Stetten, saying—

"And now, my fair young masters, ye may, an ye will, do me a singular favour."

"We can do no less than stead you, an it lay at all within compass," was replied by both. Van Heylen again hesitated for a few seconds, and then pushed boldly on, with—

"I am, be it known to ye, a merchant and trader of Sluys." The eye of d'Aurai here involuntarily travelled round the cabin, which projected far beyond the usual limits, leaving the open space, or, the waste, as we should term it, lying between the poop and forecastle, very confined even for the rowers, and which space being undecked, was seen from where they sat, to contain nothing in the shape of merchandize.

"True, my present voyage is not one precisely of traffic," observed Van Heylen, in reply to this doubtful look which he had noticed, and thus rightly construed, "although it still has relation to that, and no end else. In brief I have a trading petition to present to the King, and had hoped at once to have obtained my hearing, as I was informed, ere leaving Sluys, that the court was held within the Tower; but now I fear me, that these same revels, of which

we hear such busy rumours, will so occupy his time as to render the approach of one, humble as myself, somewhat difficult.” .

“ Impossible !” uttered Stetten, with the tone of an oracle. “ Impossible !” echoed d’Aurai. Van Heylen went on—“ Or, as you say, sirs, impossible ; what I would request of you, therefore, is, that you would be gracious enough, presently, to take charge of a few lines of prayer from me to your princely master, who, I think, in kind remembrance of some ancient dealing we had together during the late wars, will so forward my suit to the King, as to win me speedy hearing and dismissal.”

“ This,” cheerfully answered Stetten, “ is too light matter to waste words on, after the timeous help and good feeding you have given to wearied and fasting men—but can you not put your suit into as many words as may not over-fill my brain-book, and trust to me for their faithful delivery, since penman’s craft is a wearisome task, and we have yet to reach Kennington ere *couvre-feu*, if possible.”

“ That were not so safe—so *respectful*, I

mean," cried Van Heylen, at the same instant producing writing materials, " and early practice hath rendered this pen as facile in my hand as a sword in yours; it shall not, credit me, longer delay you, than so much in plain speech would do."

So saying, the merchant betook himself to his pen, and with a dispatch absolutely puzzling to these gentle esquires, proceeded to cover a sheet of the curiously fine paper, at this period just finding its way into a few hands, from Padua, where it was newly manufactured.

Exchanging looks of pity and contempt, in which, despite themselves, wonder also found some place, the soldiers patiently awaited the sealing of this petition, pledged themselves to the careful delivery of it to their master, received the reiterated thanks of their entertainer, and descending to their boat, were quickly pulling in the direction of the Tower, a short distance to the eastward of which, the "Morning Star" was, by this time, quietly moored.

"*Certes, Cousin Conrade,* thou dost lie with

marvellous and unmatchable grace," whispered young Guy to his friend, even before they had pulled well clear of the vessel.

"Would thou couldst learn to look and listen with decent gravity at least," retorted Conrade; "thy staring and wide-mouthing wonderment had more than once nearly opened the old boor's eyes, despite my pains to seal them closely up."

"But, in the name of riddle-making, to what end all this lie-coining-and bubble-blowing, which has wound up in thy being saddled with a brief to the Earl of Derby, which 'tis more than possible, were it to reach him ever, would give note that it is to be delivered by his lordship's trusty Peter la Foret, or the gentle Armauri de Burgo—marry, I shall be sore puzzled to name my godmother!"

"Why, good faith, mynheer went rather beyond me in that course, I confess," answered Conrade; "but who might dream that the old kaus-eater was so clerkly? I wanted a worded message, not a penned letter; however, it matters little, since this may do as

well in his hands who has the trick to unriddle it.”

“ And may I know to whom you intend delivering this trust, if not to the right owner, whose hand I cannot think it is ever designed to reach ?”

“ To whom but the Count Alaine, whose welfare, I suspect, it more nearly touches than the Earl of Derby’s ?”

“ To our master ?” replied the astonished d’Aurai, “ I see not thy drift in this.”

“ May be not,” replied Stetten, “ but have thou but patience, and a very few hours may open thine eyes to the policy of my thus closely hunting the scent on which kind fortune hath this day laid us. Meantime, Guy, do thou keep thy teeth as close shut on all that is passed, as if thou wert dealing blow for life or death, since I suspect we play now for no less a stake, until I have seen and spoken with our lord ; after which time, I will see thee at supper, and show thee how much more lies under this adventure than thou now dreamest of.”

The boat had by this time reached the nearest stair, without the walls of the Tower, and the challenge of the sentinel informing them that the gates were closed for the night, Conrade desired the boat's crew to follow him, and, thus accompanied, proceeded quickly to the quarters of his lord, Sir Alaine de Rerefonde.

## CHAPTER V.

**ALAINE**, Count de Rerefonde, was, by birth, a Fleming ; he derived from his father an inconsiderable property on the banks of the Rhine, with a claim to the highest German ancestry, and from his mother, who was a Flanders heiress, the title of Count, and the more substantial inheritance of the broad lands and ancient castle of Rerefonde.

The claim of the heiress to this title and its seignorial rights, was, on her father's death, disputed by his twin brother, Count Bertram de Courtressin, who claimed, that the lands of the house, which had been by their father

equally divided between himself and his twin brother, in consideration of the peculiarity of their birth, should, in his person, be again incorporated, as next heir male, to the seignory ; and his claim being preferred to that of a woman, by the warlike, feudal sovereign, judgment was, by the court, of which he was the chief, twice given in Sir Bertram's favour, assigning to the heiress, in lieu of her lands and seigniorial rights, a yearly pension, to be paid by her uncle—upon, however, the spirited maiden rejecting this award, and claiming the right of trial by combat, it was, of course, allowed, but clogged with such heavy conditions, as rendered the chance of her procuring a champion almost desperate. For this purpose only fourteen days were allowed her, when it was decreed that the appellant should be bound to do battle, to the uttermost, in close lists, against all comers, being of the house of Rerefonde, from sunrise until noon, on a summer day ; when, if proving craven, being overthrown and yielding, or disabled and held to mercy, it was furthermore decreed that he

should then and there be hanged without the lists, with his shield reversed about his neck, for having contumaciously and falsely maintained a suit against judgment of the sovereign court, twice given.

The high-spirited heiress, nothing daunted by these hard conditions, in order to fairly meet them, made offer, by proclamation, of her own hand and fortune, together with the title she maintained her right to, as a reward to any born gentleman, or free burgess, however poor, who might successfully champion her claim against her uncle and his greedy kin.

The lists were erected without the walls of Bruges, the day of trial arrived, and, out of three adventurers, being all who offered to peril life for this fair prize, the ladye chose, as 'tis said, not the most experienced, or most stalwart, but the youngest and the comeliest of these bold spirits, and, presenting him her gage, declared the German knight, Sir Otho de Hertzstein, her champion.

Sir Bertram, the defendant, was, himself,

too old and feeble to appear in person, and his son being but a youth, there appeared, on his part, according to the conditions, four near kinsmen, all equally ready and anxious to maintain, to the death, the claim of heirs male to the Seignory of Rerefonde.

In the grey, sober light of a summer's morning, the eastern gates of Bruges rose, and her drawbridges were lowered, to leave free egress to the judicial cavalcade proceeding to the lists; and, within the next half hour, there were few of the population of this vast city, but such as were fairly bed-ridden, who tenanted any portion of the space within her walls, save only such of the high places as overlooked the lists, and on these the living mass might be seen clung together, close as swarming bees.

The judges gravely betook them to their places of honour; and, close upon their left, attended by many noble dames, who came to countenance this assertion of female rights, was seated the fair challenger;—an ashy palleness sat upon her brow, but she wore, notwithstanding, a gallant and a cheerful look,

as she proudly bent to the salute of her noble judges.

The trumpets now sounded, and, by signal of the marshal, the raised barriers gave free entrance, on one side, to the ladye's champion, who, lightly reining up his horse before the gallery wherein his ladye sat, gracefully and gaily bowed his recognition, and the proud heart of Anne de Rerefonde sank within her, as, in that moment, the clank of the fallen barrier reminded her, that, at its next upraising, the graceful stranger before her must pass beneath it a victor or a felon, to a bridal bed or a bloody grave.

The opposite barrier now rose in its turn, and gave entrance to the first of the defendants, whilst at the same instant the glorious sun shot forth impetuously from a mass of dark clouds, and climbed the skies decked in his most gorgeous array.

A shout from the impatient multitude proclaimed the time for action was arrived, and faithful to his duty, as that shout subsided, the sonorous tones of the marshal were heard

repeating, after the formulary of chivalry—  
“ God defend the right !”

“ Amen !” exclaimed the bold maiden, raising her right hand to heaven.

“ Sound trumpets,” cried the marshal, elevating his staff, “ and forward, brave knights.”

And right bravely did Sir Otho do his devoir on that day ; for, with his lance point, he fairly overthrew and put *hors de combat* his four adversaries in as many courses, thus securing the fair ladye's love, her wide lands of Rerefonde, and the title of Count ; all of which she frankly and immediately, according to her promise, conferred upon him ; and winning at the same time, by this extraordinary feat, a surname of which he was no less proud, that of “ *Devil's Lance*,” which redoubtable cognomen he continued stoutly to maintain on all occasions for some years, till marching his vassals to assist the Earl of Holland against his Friezland subjects, he was unhorsed in a fight near Ems, and refusing to surrender to the peasants about him, had his throat cut by

a Frison's knife, leaving a young widow and an infant heir to bewail his fate.

Anne de Rerefonde followed her lord too soon for the well being of her son, and Alaine was left to the pious care of the Prior of Saint John's, a guardian who, throughout his long minority, was too intent on increasing the means of his ward to devote much attention to his mind. Honest soul, he conceived the discharge of his duty consisted in curtailing as much as possible the present expenses of his charge, in order to add to his future possessions.

The youth of young de Rerefonde was, according to this plan, spent within the walls of his castle ; and, with no better instructors than his own sordid retainers, here he was compelled to abide until arrived at an age that proclaimed him free to govern his steps unchecked by the honest advice, unshackled by the niggard supplies of the good Prior of Saint John's.

At this most dangerous period, loosed on the world with untamed spirits, rude health, a

handsome person, and abundant supplies, young de Rerefonde ran a dazzling and a rapid course with fortune, and sparkled for his day, the prince's friend, the ladye's minion, the courtier's envy, the observed of all observers ; until the devil, gaming, backed by an inordinate love of pleasure and great state, beheld him, while yet scarce bearded, stripped of all those possessions his adventurous father had hardly won, of all that gold his reverend guardian had so wisely hoarded, and of his recent greatness no vestige left, saving his title of Count, and the unalienable walls of the Castle of Rerefonde from which he derived it.

In this race of prodigality he had borne himself too much above the world to create real friends, even his benefits were flung with too careless a hand to call for gratitude, which it was too plain he neither courted nor cared for, and as his necessities thickened, his pride and fierce impatience under the changed atmosphere which surrounded him, soon drove from his side the few amongst his courtly followers who

affected even to sympathise in his reverses, and Alaine de Rerefonde stood upon his wrecked fortune solitary and alone—and yet, in truth, not more so than when he had glittered the foremost of a throng of applauding sycophants, amongst whom were some who admired, many who envied, more who hated, but not one who loved.

Whilst thus he writhed under the sore pressure of daily accumulating embarrassments, the heavy exactions of the Flemish prince, and his tyrannous enforcement of them, first stirred the burghers of the rich city of Bruges to covert resistance, and soon after roused them to open defiance of their sovereign oppressor.

The fortunes of Sir Alaine were desperate ; the Prince had shewn him great personal slight, and had treated his remonstrances with scorn ; whilst his former companions, the court favourites, had sneered at the fiery, but impotent indignation of their master's once friend. He felt, therefore, that he already stood an outcast from his order. At this very crisis the

occasion for revenge arose, and the young lord of Rerefonde, abjuring the defence of nobility, became a popular leader of the plebeian cause.

Although at this time unsupported by Ghent, or any of the larger towns, the desperate game of the Bruegeois prospered for a period, and much of the success, which in the outset of the struggle attended the people's arms, was loudly and truly ascribed to the prompt measures and bold leading of the apostate noble ; and the protracted defence continued by the confederates after the murderous fight at Cassel, was ascribable to the same uncompromising energy.

On the conclusion of the amnesty which followed, Sir Alaine was quickly pressed for debts on every side, his absence therefore became necessary to his personal freedom and safety, and at this critical juncture it was that he was sought out by Artevelde, and offered the means of mending his fortunes in another land. Necessity had tamed the pride of the haughty De Rerefonde, and Artevelde's kindness soon won his confidence : he confided himself to the safe keeping of his new friend, and was by him

conducted to the last asylum he would have willingly chosen—the castle of his near kinsman, Bertram de Courtressin, the son of the man who had disputed his mother's right to the title he inherited.

The good Knight received him kindly, and willingly gave him shelter: the known feud of the families rendered his retreat unsuspected; and after lying here until the proper season arrived, he was, together with his Confessor, Father Mathieu, and one or two other desperate followers—whose security the late events had also compromised—safely conveyed on board a ship freighted for Spain, whither he resolved to journey, provided with an ample supply of knightly harness from the armoury of his kinsman, and of hard gold from the ready purse of Artevelde. Thus meanly attended, the Count de Rerefonde went boldly forth, relying, like his father, on fortune and his sword, for all that was to follow.

In due time it was known that Sir Alaine had joined the Spanish army, and soon distinguished himself above all other knight-adven-

turers in the bloody war then raging between Castile and the Moors of Grenada—but here all certain clue to his course was lost. Of the adventurers who found their way back, some declared that they beheld both him and the brawny Priest, who ever stuck by him in battle, unhorsed and made prisoners, in some desperate charge; whilst others reported him surely killed on the close of a certain day, or in the tumultuary movements which followed it.

This last version of his fate seemed confirmed by his continued silence, and in the course of time wholly prevailed—the name of Count Alaine de Rerefonde gave one added line to the long list of slaughter, and his memory was quietly consigned to the herald of his house.

The apprehensive Count Bertram breathed each day more freely, rejoiced at having removed a kinsman of such desperate fortunes from the path of his young heir; when the gathering strength of a most wild rumour again recalled the exile to the minds of men.

It so chanced that for some length of time a succession of good fortune attended the Moorish

arms ; the Christian chivalry was on most occasions worsted, if not disgraced ; and with these continued reverses, a strange whisper also came which told how the most enterprizing of the Paynim leaders and Spain's deadliest foe was in truth a Christian knight, who still bearing the cross upon his shoulder, led the followers of Mahound to battle ; nay, there were those who swore that they had heard the war cry of “ *Our Ladye of Ardembourg !* ” burst from the foremost of the Moorish lances, strangely mingled with their devilish shout of “ *Alla hu !* ”

At length it arrived that a German knight, who had been overborne in the *mélée* and made prisoner, was shortly after returned to the Spanish camp with his hurts healed, well mounted and armed, and without word of ransom.

The strangeness of this adventure was heightened by the oft repeated mysterious hints of the German—that in the Saracen leader he had full surely recognized one, whose name, if but breathed over the waters of the Rhine, would be quickly blown, and known from its source to

the sea, and as surely stained past all remedy, and the scutcheon of a noble and time honoured house blotted for ever from the rolls of chivalry.

These dark hints of the German's gradually passed from ear to ear, until the buzz of curiosity, swelling to a mighty sound, he was by all men loudly enforced to name openly at once this traitorous outcast of chivalry. Startled at the storm himself had raised, the Knight hesitated absolutely to refuse or promptly to comply—he demanded time for consideration, pleaded in defence of his silence some kindred with the apostate; the deep gratitude due to one who had given him life and freed him ransomless from captivity; also a promise of secrecy at that time exacted and solemnly given.

But knight and priest alike declared such promise must not be held or considered, till, thus pressed, the German wavered, and a word might have robbed the adventure of its chief charm, mystery; when at this critical juncture, his plea of silence was enforced by an irresistible argument, for in the next fight the loose-tongued Knight was brained under his banner by the very hand, as it was said, which once, for

that banner's sake, had plucked him from beneath the Moorish glaives, raised for his death-stroke.

This and sundry other as romantic rumours, had hardly reached, with the slow travel of the day, his native land, and set men's mouths agape, when the sudden appearance of their chief subject, in his own proper person, stifled them in their birth.

Sir Alaine returned at the happy period when his scorner, Count Lewis, was himself driven from his dominions, and an alliance with England contemplated by the victorious Flemings, urged by Artevelde, now their Ruward, and sought with avowed eagerness by King Edward.

No longer the wild gallant, whose meteor course was yet full well remembered, Sir Alaine now presented the outward seeming of a calm and well ordered man; he brought back with him the burly Father Mathieu, the witness and partaker of his every change of fortune; and was accompanied by a few confidential followers of a hardy aspect—he had happily, also, taken upon him, as it seemed, those dearer ties

which seldom fail to wind about and tame the wildest heart, for with him came two females, who, from their relative figures, might be readily supposed mother and daughter.

That the fortunes of the Seigneur of Rerefonde were bettered by his long foreign travel, was soon made manifest, since he immediately, and at no trifling cost, restored the castle of his mother to its pristine greatness, redeeming at the same time the whole of the rich domain it guarded.

Artevelde's debt too was fully and freely paid, and through his hands, men said, passed jewels of vast price, once the property and personal ornaments of the living gem, the Knight had brought with him as his bride from a far distant country, of whose wondrous beauty much was rumoured, although but little could be truly known, since the ladye went ever thickly veiled—as it was told was the custom with all high born dames in her native land.

Be all this as it might, one thing was certain, that few other eyes could truly boast of behold-

ing the charms of this stranger, or her daughter, save only his, for whose sake she had abandoned country, home, and kin ; for whose promised love she had quitted for ever her sunny bower in Spain, to be entombed within the dark walls of Ruremonde ; for thither she was almost immediately borne, whilst her daughter was—with the exception of short intervals spent at the castle—placed under the care of the sisters of a near convent—nor might such changes even have proved irreconcileable to a loving woman, had these arrived unattended with other and worse contrasts ; but, alas ! the times were rough and stirring, and her lord's soul as stern and changeful as the times, although he had the art to assume, and wear when he so willed, a gentleness, he neither truly felt nor desired to feel.

'The ladye was left too soon and over much alone ; but, if she sorrowed then, it was far more for the absence of her child and her heart's husband, than for the loved and lovely home she had, for his sake, abandoned.

For a time Sir Alaine and Artevelde con-

tinued apparent friends, and, indeed, the latter was sincerely desirous of attaching to his party a man whose influence was yet acknowledged by the burghers of Bruges, and who, in matters of action, was so unequalled ; but he was not long blinded to the fact that the Knight viewed his great power with an envious eye.

During Rerefonde's exile also had arisen an unexpected cause of dispute, which, after a time, ripened into absolute personal enmity the jealousy he already felt towards his more successful fellow rebel ; for, some time before the period of his return, his kind kinsman, Count Bertram de Courtressin, had died, and, on becoming informed of this, Sir Alaine, at his first leisure, employed himself in making full enquiry into the present disposition of the large revenues of the deceased, to which, saving the claims of one only son, himself was heir.

To this son, Artevelde, he soon learned, had been left sole guardian, and hence, for a time, was it, that he so assiduously courted the love of the great demagogue, revolving in his politic

brain a scheme of family aggrandizement only to be accomplished by the aid of the guardian of young Courtressin ; for his object was no less than by effecting a marriage between his daughter, Alzire, and this heir, to reunite in their persons the great possessions his maternal ancestor had divided.

This idea appeared so reasonable, and the adjustment so easy, that having, as he conceived, secured the confidence of the guardian by his display of wealth, and his good will by the ready services given to the English, whose interests Artevelde had embarked in body and soul, he no longer hesitated frankly making known his desire of bringing about an event which he pointed out in strong terms, would be so greatly to the benefit of the kindred houses, giving them at once present strength, and destroying a feud which accident might, at any time, rekindle, to burn to the probable destruction of both.

Artevelde listened with patience to the end, whilst the sanguine Rerefonde thus unfolded his ambitious views for his daughter's great-

ness. He admitted even the plausibility of the occasion thus offered; but, in conclusion, shewed the impossibility of entertaining the proposal, since, by the compact existing between himself and the deceased Courtressin, the destiny of the heir was already decided.

Although this disclosure was made with all possible courtesy, great was the rage of Sir Alaine, when he understood that the adopted daughter of Artevelde was the bar standing between him and his high hopes—still he at first strove hard to shake the purpose of the Ruward, by pointing out to him the superior advantage of his plan—combining, as he shewed, the security of his daughter's rights with the ultimate increase of young Courtressin's power, or, at least, of his children's—till, finding that in this he but lost labour, his anger and disappointment at last got the better of his policy, and he, in no measured terms, demanded, in right of his near kindred, to be put in full possession of the alleged compact, the legality of which he more than hinted his doubts of; threatening, in conclusion, to ex-

pose to the states, the profligate ambition of the Ruward, also to lay the case before King Edward, of England, and, in the absence of their legitimate feudal lord to demand his interference to prevent the consummation of what he termed this mis-alliance.

On being assailed with language of suspicion, and having his motives thus violently impeached—the which, although he could not fully explain, he knew to have been worthy and well founded—the Ruward promptly asserted his dignity, and, laying aside the courteous and conciliatory terms, in which he had hitherto dealt, at once rejected, on its own merit, the offer of Rerefonde ; since, as he said, had no such bar as the present compact existed, he would never, as young Courtressin's guardian, have consented to that noble's union with the child of Count Alaine's pagan bride, if bride she were—in conclusion, he ridiculed the idea of any threatened appeal to the English monarch, and defied his accuser to either move his purpose, or impeach his honour in the matter.

Stung to the quick, Sir Alaine flew to the

King, and, laying his grievances before him, demanded his interference and redress. The monarch graciously listened, it is true, but he stood too much in need of Artevelde to interfere peremptorily in an affair wherein that personage was so delicately concerned. After, therefore, obtaining from the Ruward an explanation, with which he proclaimed himself satisfied, the only way in which he exercised his power as umpire, was by insisting upon an immediate reconciliation between the parties, whom he was pleased graciously to style his trusty and true friends, and which reconciliation, indeed, in a subsequent interview, was brought about under his personal auspices, when there was a mutual promise made, of oblivion of the past, and friendship for the future—all of which was mere breath only, and but little blinded either of the principals.

Never after this did Artevelde hold the Count in any close confidence, whilst, from this time, the bated energies of the latter found a new spur in the resolve he made to thwart, as far as might be, every plan of

his late friends, even to the levelling of his great power, and the destruction of his life. No consideration for the interests of Edward longer rose to interfere with this often before half-formed resolution ; the late decision of that monarch had drawn upon him a full share of Sir Alaine's enmity, and relieved the Knight from the embarrassment of a divided purpose.

The English commissioners in Flanders had early found the influence of De Rerefonde of much service to their master's cause ; his knowledge of the characters of the different seigneurs to be awed or won, of still more ; and his ambition might have been gratified by knowing that he held place in Edward's estimation, second only to Artevelde himself ; but if, with this "half-faced fellowship," he was at no time well content, the result of his late appeal determined him to despise it, and left him free to pursue that course which, to his ambitious mind, promised a more dazzling recompence.

He was not, in thus resolving, blinded by passion to the great hazard of the play he now

determined on making; but felt, on the contrary, that safely to outwit the politic Jacob, would require no shortsighted cunning or hurried measures, but such as must be deeply laid, cautiously brought into action, and patiently worked out.

He commenced, therefore, by gradually withdrawing himself from any interference in public matters, and apparently abandoning all designs of command or distinction in his native country, usually living in great retirement in his castle of Rerefonde, and at intervals passing over to England, to the court of Edward, whose gratitude for good service done, and hopes of future aid, led him gladly to give honourable retaining to one who, in council or battle; had few superiors.

The uniform distinction with which he was treated by the English King, would have induced most minds to waver in the deep treachery he plotted against his throne; but Sir Alaine, having resolved upon the end, rarely suffered the means to influence his progress.

One of his first cares, also, had been to esta-

blish a watch over the habits and dispositions of the boy, Philip Courtressin; and this, through the intimacy of Father Mathieu with the preceptor of the wealthy heir, he was readily enabled to do. He next, in due time, caused his daughter, whose loveliness promised to be surpassing, to be introduced, under a feigned name, to the care of the sisters of our Lady de Damme, where he ascertained this youth often came, as a visitor, to see his betrothed, the adopted daughter of the Ruward—and so, having laid this train, he left the progress of it for a time to fortune, and turned his hand to deeper mischiefs.

Through the agency of Gerald Denise, the Deacon of the weavers' guild, at Ghent, he had once more opened a correspondence with his banished sovereign, who, on his part, readily promised oblivion of the past, and, indeed, all else the Knight required, on condition of his future loyalty and present assistance. Although dealing with any agent, in such a case, was hazardous, of Denise Sir Alaine felt assured, since he well knew the man's hatred of Artevelde was deep seated as his own, and from a cause far more

potent, as, but a short time before, his father, having been proved guilty of peculation, in his office, as collector for the craft, had, by the stern justice of the Ruward, been condemned to death, although he was a long tried and devoted follower of the demagogue's.

'Tis true that, by his interest, Artevelde soon after caused Denise to be elected to the office, made vacant by his father's death, and, by heaping favours on him and his family, had proved that if, as a magistrate, he was sternly just, he, at the same time, as a man, could be kindly grateful ; yet was the revengeful spirit of the son unquenched ; and, had it been otherwise, the breath of Sir Alaine would have kept the wound for ever green and rankling.

With this man, then, he readily communicated, and the seclusion in which his abode at Rerefonde was shrouded, aided his purposes, without exciting suspicion, since a lovely cause for this solitude was known to have long existed, in his fair Countess, whose caprice it was to live thus hidden from the public gaze.

Thus had Sir Alaine been privately fo-

menting and urging onward the great plot, which was to change the crown of England, overthrow Artevelde's huge power, restore Lewis to his uncircumscribed masterdom, and unite, in the person of young Alzire's eldest born, the rich seigneuries of Rerefonde and Courtressin.

To the full extent of his precious schemes Sir Alaine had few confidants, and these seldom further trusted than might be needful for the prosecution of some present details; Stetten was, perchance, of all others, save the Priest, Mathieu, the man who knew most of his master and his measures, and in his way had fallen the river adventure lately described, the which, he had good foregone reasons for concluding bore closely indeed upon that master's interests—for, although Artevelde had, as yet, evinced no open suspicion of the Knight or his movements, yet did the slightest demonstration of such a man, at this juncture, point too startlingly home not to awaken a sense of danger.

Immediately on landing, therefore, Conrade proceeded direct to his leader's quarter, which

was situated in one angle of a large castellated-looking mansion, lying some quarter of a mile west of the Tower, and near to the Posterne, the main building being, at the same time, occupied by his men-at-arms, and their followers, a considerable body of which he had been lately collecting, to assist Derby, in Guienne ; at least this was the motive given out.

The boat's crew, properly belonging to the Constable of the sea, being unable to gain admittance to the Tower—as the gates were finally closed each day at sun-down, ever since the imprisonment and disgrace of Nicholas de la Beche—it became necessary to take the fellows along, and provide them with quarters for the night ; giving d'Aurai, therefore, directions how to dispose of them, Conrade sought his master—when, desiring Oswald d'Arliss, the page on duty, to announce to the Count that he was returned from Gravesend, and had occasion for an immediate interview, he continued impatiently to pace the narrow passage, until the stripling returned, to usher him into the presence of his lord.

## CHAPTER VI.

SIR ALAINE was still a man of handsome appearance ; his features, although somewhat too strongly marked, wore, when in repose, an almost soft and gentle expression ; but they were mutable as the winds of heaven, or the various shades of fierce, selfish spirit, which governed their owner, and, in anger, their expression was deadly. Arrived at the meridian of man's age, but neither tamed by time, nor bent by toil, although of the former he had tasked every hour he had lived, to the uttermost, and, with the latter, had held full fellowship ; the only stamp of service he bore

was rather advantageous to his appearance than otherwise, since, under Spain's hot sun, his naturally fair complexion had acquired a ripened tint, which better accorded with his severe proportions.

When the page entered, to announce the return of the esquire, his lord sat within his chamber, alone, and was singularly occupied, for a knight and proved soldier of this age, for, before him lay a book, with whose charmed page he seemed intently occupied.

He was richly clad in the military court dress of the day, which was composed of a thickly pourpointed vest, worn beneath an open-breasted tunic, reaching nearly to the ground, a cloak very full, but descending little below the waist, boots of crimson cloth, embroidered, sharp-pointed, and turning upwards at the toes—a fashion at this time in its infancy, but which afterwards grew to such a preposterous excess as to call for an edict against its increase—to his heels were affixed the golden spurs of his order, and about his hips he wore the knightly belt, lavishly passamented or em-

broidered, and studded in various places with precious stones ; from the right side of this rich girdle depended a dagger, some fourteen inches long, and on the left was a vacant sling, from which commonly hung the estoc, or short sword, carried on ordinary occasions, but now lying on the table, together with his gloves and bonnet—beside him burned a single lamp, that little served to lighten the apartment, for its blaze was contrivedly thrown upon the pages of the book, with which the knight was yet occupied when his esquire entered.

“ Now, Stetten,” he carelessly demanded, lifting his eyes from off the page, as the closing door wakened his attention, “ hast seen these same ships they would fain persuade me to peril my horses in, for transport ?”

“ I have, my lord,” answered Conrade, “ and, in truth, think them but poorly fitted for the purpose, being small, ill-ordered, and unprovided with separate stalling, without which our mettled cattle may not well be trusted ; two of these ships are open above, and

the others, that be covered, have scarce height between the floor and the over-deck, to allow a horse to raise his head, without periling his brains."

"Well," cried the Knight, hastily, "and what answer made the knave commissioners, to these objections of thine to their ill-contrived craft?"

"O! they urged, forsooth, that I was far too curious in my searching; that ships were not stables, nor horses likely to be so overly nice in choosing—summing up this, and much more of the like wordy wisdom, with the fact, that the voyage was for such short duration, it mattered not, truly, the beasts being a little cramped for space."

"The slipper-tongued varlets!" exclaimed Sir Alaine, kindling into impatience, "what know they of the space needed for the safe transport of a good horse, more worthy careful tendance than the best of their breed? and the voyage so short, say they! when 'tis well known that Gualtier Manny, on his first passage, was for forty days on the main seas, and

after all care-taking lost the mounting of full twenty lances, besides lighter cattle to double that sum—and did these English louts think to persuade me into risking one of the good horses that have held me such pains and cost in the gleaning—no, not to save their necks, and redeem the very souls of their whole generation, up to the slave who fathered the first of the mongrel race; and I will myself ride down and so tell them, to-morrow's fooling between the court and these rustic citizens fairly over. I have the King's order, and they shall find me fitting conveyance for both horses and men, and this quickly too, although no foot do we budge their way—not that we are in such absolute haste for two or three days, according to the time by Barberoux appointed for his arrival before *Gris-nez*.”

“ Unless, with your pardon,” interposed Conrade gravely, “ the news I have now to tell leads you to change your purpose, and makes you less absolute as to the manner of our going, so we may get off unscathed—the which, that it surely does, is more than a blind guess.”

"Hah! then what hath reached thee, good Stetten?" eagerly enquired the Knight; "tidings from Croquart? or has Denise sent us aught from Ghent?"

"I know nought of Croquart; but the news you last had by Rainer," answered Conrade, with a look of deepening mystery; adding— "but in good faith, my Lord, here be those come from Ghent, Denise never sent, or guessed would make such a trip, else had he surely found means to let you know of it by a less fickle messenger than Dame Fortune, who has, nevertheless, proved for once a trusty."

"Speak not in riddles, man," cried the Knight, in that low but emphatic tone so indicative of an impatient nature, tightly curbed by self-control: "say thy news plainly, since thou knowest I am but dull, and not wont to spend much care or time in unravelling that I can find ways to break. In the name of patience, speak out, and let us hear in what mare's nest thou hast had thy plain wit so addled, Conrade Stetten."

Conrade needed not further questioning, but

collecting himself for a moment, whilst his master's keen glance was fixed upon him as if to anticipate his secret in his looks, he, in as brief a manner as could be well desired, narrated the chance of his falling in with the "*Morning Star*," and all that followed the adventure. Calmly and silently did his master attend to this relation, until the speaker arrived at the point of the letter's being entrusted to his care by Van Heylen. Here Sir Alaine broke in with delighted impatience, crying aloud—

"St. Peter ! 'twas a politic sleight, and right well put forth on the shifting old fox ! Ha, ha ! the Zealander's muddy blood runs too thick in his veins to match the ready current of thy Brabant wit, Conrade ! But where is this precious scrawl ?—produce it."

Conrade obeyed promptly, and handed the letter to Sir Alaine, who, glancing over the cover, read aloud—

"‘To the most high and mighty Prince Henry of Lancaster, Earl of Derby ;’” continuing in an under tone, as he coolly tore off the twisted silken threads which were passed

round it and fixed beneath the seal : “ Sir Henry of Derby, by your leave, your clerkship, I'll be sworn, goes not beyond spelling out a troubadour ditty fairly written in good Provençal : this lout Zealander's scrawl will need careful interpreting, so be mine that office.”

Thus saying he unfolded the paper—as he perused the few lines which formed the body of the epistle, his look grew serious and intent, and continued rivetted upon it long after the subject matter must have been fully known to him. At length, carefully re-folding it, he rose, and for some moments walked to and fro, with a slow and measured step ; then suddenly raising his eyes to his observant esquire, he reseated himself, after the manner of one who has considered and decided upon his course—next motioned Conrade to draw close, which he did, and, with his right hand leaning on the table, bent before his lord, in an attitude of deep and respectful attention.

“ Conrade,” began the Knight, gravely and emphatically, like one who is inwardly more

moved than he chooses, by any outward demonstration, to make visible—"Conrade, these free companions have been too snail-paced in their progress, and here, I fear me, although it appears not in words as yet, is my whole scheme about to be laid bare to Edward, and all our latter labours, like the past, blown to the winds, and made for ever void."

The Count again paced the apartment. Conrade replied: "I cannot think your design on Cadsant may be known, since even they who come to aid us know not where you purpose to first strike a blow. By whom then—?"

"By whom?" cried Sir Alaine, catching only the last unfinished sentence, "why by that arch devil, the brewer-king of Ghent, who keeps the lesser fiends of hell in fee, else might he be sometimes overreached, not our best devices for ever broken, like half parched reeds, over the heads of the plotters."

Flinging himself once more into his seat, he endeavoured, by a strong effort, to tame his spirits to a calm review of the probable effects of this arrival, in which, he felt certain, chance had no hand.

That the project which he, in concert with Prince Lewis, had planned, for the surprisal of Cadsant, possessed of which, the supplies promised from France, might, unmolested, sail up the Scheldt, and aid the blow ready to fall upon the Ruward's head, even in Ghent, the stronghold of his power, had reached the ears of this most vigilant person, was a conjecture more than probable; and even this singular selection of his daughter for a messenger, was quite in accordance with the singular character of the man. How far even the very details of the present purpose might be known to him, was past surmise; yet, on reflection, the Knight found there existed little likelihood of his own personal security being impeached, since, upon Denise, who had been the only agent directly trusted between himself and Prince Lewis, he knew his dependance safely grounded, and, with the latter, his remaining unsuspected, was, under any event, too important a circumstance to leave him in any dread of betrayal from that quarter.

Still, the existence of the plot once known, at this crisis, would, past hope, destroy it ; and to prevent a consummation so destructive of his own ambitious hopes, when, as he thought, on the very eve of completion, was worth some added risk, and prompted him to make a bold venture, to preserve the secrecy so important at this hour.

"What then thinkest thou, Conrade?" demanded the Knight, breaking the long silence which preceded his present resolution, "will these simple voyagers of Flanders seek prompt communication with their friends on shore, or will they quietly bide on ship-board, to await some reply to this missive?"

. "Past doubt," replied Conrade, "they will stir no foot until full time be allowed for reply : for otherwise the old cloth-worker would not have been so pressing for a speedy delivery of his letter, making it appear that his after-steps must be governed wholly by the nature of the Duke's answer."

"'Tis well, he shall not be kept long in doubt. And now, Stetten," continued Sir

Alaine, assuming a manner at once kindly and impressive, "here is loud call for a bold and hazardous adventure—one, which must be pursued with a clear head and a resolute heart, and in such moments has it ever been that have borne heaviest on you, good Conrade."

"You may still do so, and as confidently," said the resolute Brabançon, "since at this time, am I neither less able nor less willing, to bear up purpose of yours, than you have found me in times past."

"And I would trust a thousand lives, had I so many, upon thy fidelity, my thrice trusty esquire—it is my shame that thou shouldest yet be so called, since thy spurs have been long well won, and shall be fixed to thy heel, under the proudest banner lifted in the next field fortune enables me to claim a boon on."

Stetten impressively bowed his acknowledgements, and the Knight went on.

"It is necessary, then, to the sure guiding of our promised fortune, if not to the safe keeping of our heads, that this wise embassage pass not into King Edward's presence, without first

enduring some previous examination before certain authorities, no less interested than his Grace in this hopeful mission.

"To guide matters to this issue must be your office, Conrade Stetten, or rather let me call you Master Peter la Foret, since 'tis in that same right gentle name you must proceed in the matter of this negociation. Thus, then, let it be—but first inform me, tarries Rainer or any of his brisk mariners on shore with us here this even?"

"I am not sure, my lord; but he promised that he would meet me here to-night, to know your pleasure as to proceeding with him to Sluys, or whether he should at once sail, to keep a look-out for those so soon expected—belike he is now below."

"If so, bring thou him hither, Conrade, quickly—haste, and let me know."

The esquire departed to seek the sea captain, for whose presence his master appeared so desirous. The latter followed him to the door, and, closing it after him, broke forth in hurried and impatient accents—"Can

it then be—has then fortune again and so soon betrayed my patience?—for Derby's rude diversion in France fully assures me, although it hath not yet been openly avouched, that Normandy's purpose is well known to Edward—he has of late, too, abated his high flights of kingship, appeased the proud Sir Priest Stratford, with the hot nobles at his back, and to-morrow he tilts and feasts with the citizens; then, calls together the commons and estates of his realm, whilst, in return, these wooden-pated knaves—ever pleased to be thus whistled together, and tickled by the King's courtesy, in asking for that, they shrewdly suspect he has mettle and means to seize in their despite—will, in their greasy gratefulness, decree to his use thrice more than he would ever dream of demanding; and so place him on too bold a guard for Normandy to break through, though backed by the whole force of France, Burgundy, the Emperor, aye, and Flanders to boot, even if we ward off this threatened disclosure, and succeed in flinging down the idol that now rules there, and is so worshipped by the worse than pagan multitude.”

The speaker was silent for a moment, and then resuming the subject of his long desire, continued to soliloquize aloud.

"I once hoped that Edward's high blood, spurred by the advice of Artois, as well as by sundry prickings of mine own, and hallood on others who join in any cry that's up, without guessing what game's afoot, had, long ere this, pushed him on to a brave defiance of these rebel priests and their sturdy abettors, 'till they, in turn enraged, let fall the bolt of church's censure they held suspended over his crown.

"Then!" continued Sir Alaine, kindling as he spoke, "would all our free lances have gathered to a head under the royal banner, and so a fire been laid to the ripe furze here, under cover of which, Normandy might have slipped through the gate, he lacked manhood openly to assault. But it would not be, time let pass may not be recalled; and now, this last cast lost, will utterly change the game, and I, with many more, I doubt, must henceforth play for safety, not for gain or glory."

The restraint Sir Alaine had hitherto im-

posed upon himself, gave way wholly before this self-avowal of all his hopes and plans being thus scattered and made void, by a breath from the master spirit against which he wrought, and, as it appeared, ever wrought in vain : raising his clenched hand above his head he added, with fearful bitterness and contempt—

“ The leper’s curse wither the impotent and feeble tools I’m doomed to work with ! and curses on my own ill fate, which ever places me where both hand and head must be shackled, clogged, by the will of these princely . . . she sends into the world to rule over men—things, born with crowns on their heads, and leading-staves in their hands, whose brows would better have borne cap and bells, and to whose grasp and guiding a fool’s bauble had been better fitted!—And I am but a fool,” he added, rising and pacing the chamber round, “ to suffer this idle spleen so to start my reason !—A moment, and the fiend will depart from me.”

It is well that extremely passionate natures possess within themselves the power of quick control, for the suffering is too terribly violent

to be long endured without overturning the fabric of reason. So was it with Sir Alaine : after an internal struggle of a few moments, he became to all outward appearance calm ; and on the re-entrance of Conrade, accompanied by Rainer, alluded to the strange event which had been as strangely made known to him, as though his composure had never been shaken a jot by it.

"Now, Rainer, thou art welcome, and comest ever in right time," cried Sir Alaine, seating himself, and motioning with his hand for the two comers to do the like.

"I'd give a prince's dower to be able to say so much of the wind, Sir Alaine," retorted the man, in a rough, familiar tone, and with a loud laugh at his jest, as, drawing more in front the richly-ornamented Moorish knife he carried in his girdle, he flung himself into a chair, and began tugging at the gaily-wrought gloves he wore, in order to release the huge red paws, grown uneasy in their delicate but close prison.

Rainer was a man about forty years of age, but bearing in his bloated face and bulky person

the marks of a life more worn than by the mere years it counted : he was dressed in overdone finery, and had an air of rough humour twinkling in his small grey eyes, which half redeemed, at a closer glance, the unprepossessing and blotched appearance of his face and bare bull-neck.

When the worthy we have described had adjusted his finery to his own ease,—a task not immediately accomplished—Sir Alaine, who had continued to regard the sailor with a half-amused, half-impatient look, that bespoke them well acquainted, at last broke out with—

“ In the devil’s name, Rainer, set thyself at ease in this Gascon frippery they have laced so tightly over that fishy hide of thine, and tell me how many hands there be on shore with thee here to-night ? ”

“ Only Herman and the four knaves that rowed me hither in the shallop,” answered Rainer ; “ who are somewhere below, either drunk or asleep by this, I guess, since they’ve had time enough, and rarely miss it.”

“When purpose ye to sail then, in search of Barberoux, and mine ancient Page; who brings his bold lances to strike a blow for his once lord?”

“I should a-dropped down with the morning tide, but I thought it best to wait till you made up your mind about the fitness of the other craft, ere I took the horses on board: these once landed, and I fairly off *Cap Gris-nez* again, I should look to have a short cruise till the bullies heave in sight; unless the devil, unwilling to lose a good chance, pays off all scores, and so nets his own, at a single haul, on the sea, instead of waiting till they are pricked into his clutch by a lance-point, or brained by axe or mace, in two’s or three’s, as may be, on the land.”

“So, ‘tis well,” continued Sir Alaine; “and now, Rainer, here is a turn arrived that puts us in some peril; the which *thou* mayst, ‘tis true, avoid, by seizing the present time, and setting thy good ship in motion, so gain the open sea.”

"And you, and my comrade Stetten, and all the rest here?" enquired the seaman, breaking in on the half pause in the Knight's speech.

"Must, an the worst come that is expected, abide a heavy fall or a sharp blow, as may be," coolly answered Sir Alaine.

"The devil!" exclaimed Rainer, turning his keen eyes upon the calm countenances of Stetten and his lord; "and can I, by staying, do aught towards rescue?"

"Much," replied the Knight, "but the venture is perilous, and I would not deceive thee."

"And what did you ever hear of Ralph Rainer, Count Alaine?" demanded the sailor, slapping his red hand upon the highly illuminated page lying before him whom he addressed, "to bid him '*go*' when those whom he calls comrades might by any venture be rescued. I swear by the holy book my hand now rests on," he added, rising and devoutly eyeing the collection of virelays he mistook for a missal, "the 'Free Maiden' shall lie where she now does, till the grass grows a yard long on her

kelson ; if by so lying, her crew or captain can lend a helping hand to the cause or to you.”

Sir Alaine grasped the rough hand presented to him, saying, “And in return, Rainer, look you to find good account in this hearty and boldly offered service. This much I can at least promise ; I gain no ends of mine, but you as surely prosper ; and if I sink here——”

“ Why, we’ll drown all together,” cried the reckless Rainer, with a hoarse laugh, “ for, by the Virgin of Ardres, I swear, I would never take to the plank that offered safety to me alone, when both good ship and brave crew were to be left drowning in my sight.”

“ Spoken like a true man,” cried the Knight, “ and I will trust thee. Hark thee, Conrade, where be those Saxon boatmen that rowed ye hither ?”

“ They are now below,” replied Conrade, “ since they were an hour over the gate-shutting at the Tower, and might not win their own quarters.”

“ So, I guessed as much, and now hearken well, both : let those of Rainer’s crew present

here, bid to supper—as in good fellowship they may—these stout knaves of the Constable's that laboured for us on this lucky voyage; the rogues will not be slack in coming, I warrant; and be it thy care, Conrade, that they have drink enough for a full carouse. Be not niggard in the provision, but have set before them a quantity sufficient utterly to drown whatever of instinct, nature bestows on their base kind. This will require small sleight—I know these hogs—let them but have enough drink, and they'll swill whiles they can raise cup to lip."

"That will they, sots," interposed Rainer, with one of his loud laughs, "or whiles any kind hand will lift cup so high for them."

"When these swine English then, are besotted past all sense and motion," continued Sir Alaine, "let your fellows, Rainer, put on the proper jerkins of so many of the Constable's crew, and thus habited, at early dawn, row you and Conrade to where this Heylen abides—the response of Sir Henry of Derby—with the

which it shall be my present care to duly furnish you, and yours, at such time and place duly to deliver, when, if the subtlety prove—as I have good reason to hope—successful, those whom we seek to trap will readily accompany you into the King's boat—for such it will of course be deemed, rowed by fellows royally badged, and directed by the gentle Norman, Peter la Foret.

“Once they are cargoed within the boat, make the best of your way towards Baynard's Castle, for this will I name in the letter as the appointed place of meeting; but halting short of this destination, which questionless will be unknown to your company, be careful suddenly to land them at Saint Andrew's Stair; it leads to that large quarter left desolate by the last summer's pest; the *Ban* has not been yet removed, and within the whole of that wide range each street is voiceless and deserted as the sands of Afric.

“Once here, the game's our own; we hold them at hopeless advantage; and if the knaves

turn restive on our hands, we can deal with them at pleasure.

"I will be in waiting to meet you on the moment of your landing—the men of the party, of whom the fewer they bring the better, must be instantly secured, after night-fall put on board Rainer's vessel, and so conveyed back to breathe their native air within the keep at Rerefonde; the maiden we will more honourably quarter, and deal with after a gentler fashion.

"How say'st thou, Conrade, thou hast seen the wench; has she charms enough to induce thee to barter thy gentle Brabant name for a share of this brewer's pelf? By my soul it were no ill chance for a poor gentleman to be able thus to put in a claim as heir to Artevelde, come his end when and how it may. His son is dead, this wench is his avowed daughter, and must inherit."

"I'd take the maid, without question as to her dower or estate," replied Conrade, "but such fortune is far beyond my aim."

"The worse marksman thou," coolly an-

swered Rerefonde, “since I jest not; for, by the Virgin, an she fall into my hands thou or some other shall woo her, aye, and wed her, ere her maidenhood be forty hours older.”

“That,” cried Rainer, “were a wooing and wedding fitting a sailor; and if the wench be right up and down, and complete in her spars; with a fair allowance of teeth, a pair of eyes, and not much over forty; for lack of a better I'll be her bachelor, and take her for bad or good, as may be. Seeking for a wife is at all times like dropping a fishing line into the sea; you never can tell rightly what you've got till you haul up, so, at the worst, I'll not be the first that has baited for a mackerel and caught a dog-fish.”

“Fairly and sailoriy said; and now, Comrade, tell me,” concluded the Knight, “dost thou well understand my drift in this device? and wilt thou task all thy art to work it to a prosperous issue?

“Nothing can promise fairer,” replied Stetten, who had listened with deep attention to his master's plan, “nor can aught be more

easy of execution, if once the old fox Heylen puts himself and his fair freight under my guidance ; to lead him to which, I promise there shall be no lack of argument on my side.”

“It shall need little argument to work that, or I am much mistaken,” answered Sir Alaine ; “the face all things will wear, might well mislead more politic heads than his we deal on ; will there not appear before his eyes the Duke’s own body servant, the King’s livery, and the King’s boat ? while, to make all perfect, has not kind fortune given to my keeping this good dagger of Derby’s, bearing his signet on the head of the handle ? Ha, ha ! little did I guess, when I pawned my dudgeon ‘gainst his on last Michaelmas eve, on who should drive blade deepest into the board we sat before, that my prize was to turn to such profitable account in so serious a matter !”

The Knight here turned to assort his materials for writing, whilst Conrade, thus reminded of a feat which had called forth loud

admiration from the lookers on; at the time, glibly took up the theme.

“They were both truly given, and heavily stricken blows,” cried the squire; “I won the roan gelding I now ride, from the English esquire, young Novo Burgo, by wagering on your part. Marry, I mind me, I would gladly have drawn bet though, when I saw Sir Henry’s guard quivering within an inch of the stout table he had pierced: and never drew I shorter breath before spurring to the onset, than I did, as you, in turn, lifted your arm, Sir Alaine; nor did my heart ever leap higher at a trumpet sound, than it did when I heard your hand ring on the board through which the good blade had passed, right to the hilt.”

“It was a fair omen, Conrade,” answered the Knight, “and here gives us promise of better service than I, at that time, could dream of; for, with the signet on the haft of the dudgeon that blow won for me, will I impress the wax which shall bind the letter I prepare. But now, do you both hasten, and have these

fellows of the boat bidden in good time : they will have gotten supped, else, and betaken them to their straw, the which, I take it, next to liquor, they would be most loth to leave."

" Trust \*me, Sir Alaine," cried Rainer, rising, " an if they were so styed, a clink of the can would draw them forth again ; doubt not but I'll have the knaves unwitted ere the first cock crows."

So saying, and following Conrade, he turned to depart, when the voice of Sir Alaine, for a moment, arrested his step.

" Be careful," he whispered, " so to manage this debauch of the fellows, that nothing may after appear—their jerkins must be re-conveyed to them, before they have awakened from their drunken forgetfulness : the knaves will be silent after, for their own sake, and present suspicion will be best lulled by the night's carouse being made general—so contrive it.

" When the letter is prepared, young d'Arliß shall convey it within your chamber, Conrade—be early afloat, Rainer, and so, good night to both."

So parted the seigneur of Rerefonde and his most trusted followers. Leaving the former, therefore, to concoct the letter, which was to lure those whose mission he so distrusted, within his power ; we will accompany the latter to the guard-room, or, as it was called, muster-chamber, used by the hardy retainers of this lord, which was on the same range of building, and, indeed, within a few paces of the portion occupied by the Knight himself.

" You have been thrice sought to supper, Master Stetten," said d'Arliss, the page, as Conrade passed through the outer room.

" I hope thou hast found thine own, boy," answered Conrade, " else wilt thou stand a fair chance of sleeping on thy dinner, for the buttery will be closed, I suspect, ere thou art dismissed, this even."

" I have too much regard for my stomach to leave it absolutely dependant on Sir Alaine's humour, thank you, Master Conrade," replied the ready boy, with a knowing wink at his senior.

" Devil doubt you, young provident—no

rogue, no page, is a saying as old as my service, and it holds true, yet, I see."

" As true as it did when thou wert page to the old Seigneur of Vevay, Conrade; and used, an all be true that's told, to ruffle it abroad in thy master's best gown and gloves, having seen him safe to bed at sun-down."

" Treasure not such idle tales," said Conrade, pausing at the door-way, unable to suppress a smile at the ready memory of the boy; " keep thine ears open and thy mouth shut—so wilt thou tell fewer lies than thou hearest, and be, in so much, honester than thy fellows."

So saying, Conrade closed the dialogue and the door, whilst the light-hearted page turned on his heel, tossed over the log which burned before him, with the point of his dagger, and fell briskly on the reserve he had provided, in the event of being kept on duty after the supper hour.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE muster-chamber was a long, low, vaulted apartment, the lower end of which was occupied by a deep, arched fire-place, on each side of which were seats of stone-work, having in front of them screens of the same material, about the height of an ordinary table, and answering this purpose as well as forming boundary walls against the fire, and guards for those who occupied the seats, which were very favourite dormitories in cold weather with the men on duty.

The four walls were well furnished with strong wooden pegs, placed at equal distances,

and numbered ; between each of these stood a grooved arm-rack, of a solid and enduring make, fit for the rough service of such a quarter, against many of which, leaned the tall lance and heavy sword of some man-at-arms ; and from the correspondent pegs were hung, gauntlets, helmets, cuirasses of iron, and sundry other portions of defensive harness ; whilst, on other projections, purposely contrived for such gear, were placed the heavy war-saddles, and horse furniture of the cavaliers.

In the middle of the apartment was fixed a large oblong table, under, and immediately about which, was thinly strewn a litter of rushes, that might once have formed a carpet of green, but whose present colour corresponded, pretty nearly, with the earthen floor, thus partially covered.

About this board, when ~~Conrade~~ entered, were seated at high supper a number of the Knight's principal retainers ; and at what might, by courtesy, be styled its head, was a reserved place—to this the senior esquire

moved, as of right, accompanied with many jovial welcomes, and greeted—by the few who felt warranted to take so much freedom—with some jests on his late arrival.

“ We have, in our simple breeding, so long waited for thee to come to us, that our appetites be utterly gone from us,” said young d’Aurai to Conrade, as the latter took his seat, at the same time carefully wiping the blade of the knife he had been busied with, and returning it to the sheath within his doublet.

“ I can see so much,” replied Stetten, “ thanks for your courtesy.”

“ Let Guy d’Aurai speak for himself in this matter,” bawled a stout low built young man from the opposite end of the board, and who was distinguished from those about him, not less by his peculiar habit, than by a certain freedom of carriage at all times characteristic of a sailor; for such the speaker, Herman Rainer, was, and brother of the personage already introduced to the reader.

“ I for one, have yet left room enow to stow away in without swimming over deep ; I got

under weigh with the first, but I'll carry on with the last I warrant, so think not to be hurried, Master Stetten."

" Nay here be many more of that mind, Herman," added a gigantically proportioned man, wearing the habit of a priest, who, seated on Stetten's left was in the act of curiously probing a rude gash made by some heavy hand, into the very depths of a mighty standing-pie before him, whose massive walls of pastry sustained by formidable buttresses of the like material, girt in a variety of birds and beasts, in numbers sufficient to have furnished, when living, a creditable freight for another ark.

" Halloo here, mark where sneaks in another laggard," cried d'Aurai, now observing Ralph Rainer, as he rolled himself into a seat by his brother Herman.

" Better late, than get no berth," retorted Rainer, falling briskly on the good things before him.

" But methinks, Master Rainer," observed his reverence, without however once lifting his

eyes from the more important discoveries he was so eagerly pursuing—

“ Methinks, I say, Master Ralph, and as I have had occasion to say more than once, it would better become thy place and breeding, and the example thou owest to thy young brother here—whom heaven help to a better tutor—were thy bonnet on the wall, instead of being cocked so saucily over thy brow, and thy head bared over the good meat before thee, for which the saints be praised.”

“ Crave your pardon,” coolly retorted the elder Rainer, “ but I am something near to the door, and being like your reverence, close shaven on the crown, am fearful of rheum i’the head: besides, Father, I feel not so overly grateful, let me say, meaning no sin in so saying, for this same eating, which is after all but what is barely needful to our living—seeing that we are to live—is common to all things, mean and mighty, from the man to the ape, from the ass to the lion, and must be ours, an we are to bide here at all, willy, nilly, and small thanks to any below or aloft.

"But set drink, good drink before me, and bid me strike my head gear, and I'll hear you with open ears. I'll vail bonnet to a flask of sweet muscat, or a flagon of right gascoigne, as briskly as I'd vail canvass to a king's banner on the high seas, and with more ready good will by half, no offence to royalty."

"Thou art a most irreverent varlet," laughingly rejoined the jolly Priest, transfixing at the same moment the plump breast of a quail, one half of which had for some time eluded his search ; "yet is not thy loose speech without some wit and reason, since, although we do owe a debt of thankfulness to Providence for all things, still assuredly in the matter of wine ought we to be thrice grateful, seeing that it is a blessing not common unto all men ; many heathen countries being utterly in darkness and blindness respecting this, as well as of other wholesome and pleasant truths which are vouchsafed by the saints' grace to us Christian men, whilst to all meaner creatures, the precious beverage is wholly and for ever denied."

"Wisely spoken, good Sir Mathieu," cried

Conrade ; " given like a well learned and a holy clerk. But come, what say you, sirs ; after so much talk of wine, would it not be unreasonably hard, an we parted without a flagon or two to brighten up our gratitude, which, for my part, I find is ever freshest when newly wetted ? "

" Surely not ! " " Well said ! " " A clink—a clink ! " " Cans and pans ! " " Who gives the first good full is the first of good fellows ! "

These, and many other such joyous cries, accompanied with loud blows stricken on the bottoms or sides of empty horns and cans with the hafts of the dudgeons used for carving, bespoke the willingness of all present to join in a carouse, as well as their eager haste to be put in possession of the blessing so lauded by their jovial Priest.

" If any here have a store of wine, let him not be backward now to produce it ; the flasks I can muster shall soon be before ye ; so, Martin, go thou and bring in my stock," cried Conrade, turning to one of the attendants, two or three of whom stood behind each person mi-

nistering to their wants, and at the same time disposing of their leavings ; the followers of a lance in fight being generally at this time his attendants, and in part his companions, at table doing the service without standing absolutely in the menial light of a modern lacquey.

Guy d'Aurai and three or four others, as promptly whispered similar directions to their servitors ; and the rude table, cleared of a portion of its more solid contents, was in a short time covered with flasks and flagons of wine, of qualities as various as the vessels which contained it, and which was drunk out of most un-vinous looking measures, meted only by the discretion of the filler.

About this time it was that Conrade took occasion to give Rainer his cue, and to send for the fellows who had manned the barge that brought him and his brother esquire from Gravesend ; whilst these, nothing loth, quickly attended such welcome summons.

Rainer, taking his brother apart, in a few words made the quick-witted Herman com-

prehend his present desire of dealing on the English boatmen, which Herman in turn communicated to those of his comrades, who were to enact in the purposed masquerade. To the care of these fellows were forthwith consigned the strangers in question; who were quickly supplied with great plenty of powerful ale, together with such share of the rarer beverage, as could from time to time be transferred by the sleight of the knave attendants, from their master's board to the hands of the rude crew who occupied the broad benches, which ran parallel with the screens we have before described as flanking the ample fire-place.

The cheerful blaze of the crackling logs soon made dim the light of the capacious fat-fed lamp hanging over the rough mess table, round whose verge were seated men, whose counsel in the field had been listened to by princes, and whose soldier jests had before now been echoed by the laugh of high-born and courtly dames, for in this barbarous age, distinctions of rank were too well defined, too strongly girt about by real power, to be

over jealously guarded ; and the free man-at-arms, who bore him boldly in the fray, took his proper place at his lord's table, without feeling either abashed or embarrassed ; or for a single moment forgetting his own dependence, and the seigneur's natural superiority.

The carouse now became deep and serious, in accordance with the devotional spirit in which it was begun, until, when within little more than an hour of midnight, it was wisely observed that as the wine waxed low, and the hour was too late to procure any from without, and as each man who possessed any, had doubtless already brought in his share, time was come, when to part was the only thing left to be done.

This proposition was however opposed by many, and most vehemently by both the Rainiers, who, after many hints thrown out to Father Mathieu, but in vain, at last rose and fairly called upon him to produce in turn his measure, to add a crowning draught to the good fellowship of the night.

“I, my sons !” answered the honest Father,

finding this too direct an attack to be silently parried, and casting, as he spoke, a look on the unblenching elder of his challengers, in which reproach and anger were oddly mixed up with a grave assumption of innocent amazement at the demand—"I, produce a crowning measure of wine, I!—now is that a cry more easily made than substantially answered; for, look ye here, how am I, being no bunch of grapes, to produce wine? unless ye tap me with the points o'your dudgeons—the which some here I know would do, and hold light, an if a rose noble might be earned by the trick—so, only, can I produce, all the wine I have, lying under my girdle."

"And wilt thou then deny *me*, Father Mathieu?" cried Herman, in a tone meant to be half reproachful, half wheedling.

"Deny thee, rogue-face?" answered the Priest, gathering confidence from the repentant tone of young Rainer; "I am too weak at denials, or I should be more civilly spoken—I deny none of ye aught that may pleasure ye, and have bestowed on ye my company this

evening; until in your wantonness ye grow restive, and would unseat me with your tongues, forgetful of the days and nights of penance and vigil I pass for your sakes, vipers and evildoers as ye are."

"We have but your word for that debt," answered the elder sailor, growing serious under this attack, and encouraged by the smiles and nods of those about him ; "and since you are so false, as well as churlish, I'll hold no terms longer, but pay out, line for line, and let the devil hold on the bight. The truth o' the matter is, since you're deaf to a low-hail, I brought you a hogshead last Wednesday se'night, from Rochelle ; now answer, Father Mathieu, was not that hogshead filled with good Picard wine ?—or was it stale buttermilk that your old friend Croquart sent to you with such charge for its safe keeping ?"

"Out, slanderer!" shouted the burly Father, in a voice of thunder, rising on his legs, and wrathfully stretching a huge paw over the table, as if anxious to clutch his accuser. "Call Croquart, thy gossip, an thou wilt, but

no friend of mine, when I have, as is well known to all here, often and utterly disclaimed the rogue, ever since he so barfacedly took to his freebooting courses. When I called him friend, he followed our master, Sir Alaine, as page, during the first rising at Bruges, when I was but a subdeacon at St. John's, and he a beardless innocent lad, whose wildest theft was a stolen kiss in the laundry, or a flask from the buttery. And yet for this, wilt thou for ever and openly be baiting me with his friendship forsooth. An thou sayest but half so much once again, this good night, Ralph Rainer, I'll brain thee where thou sittest with this empty cup."

"Fear not that, Rainer, but say boldly on," cried d'Aurai, filling, as he spoke, the massive cup in question. "I'll keep it brimming full, and the Father, thou knowest, will never throw it whiles a drop is left within; so thou may'st count fairly on his deep drink quenching his wrath."

"Ha, ha, ha!—only see here now, young Master Guy, how well you, and all of ye know

the meek and forgiving qualities of my nature."

So saying, and at the same time re-seating himself, the pacified churchman lifted the full cup in question to his lips, congratulating himself inwardly that the jest was fairly over.

But this stanch pack was now too warm and well laid on, to be flogged quickly or easily off the scent, and hardly had the raised cup gained the necessary inclination, when from various points of the table, arose loud cries of, "The wine!—what of Croquart's Picard wine?—the wine, the wine!"

Thus checked in the deep draught he meditated, the reverend Father threw up his head, with a sudden jerk—replaced before him the scarce tasted cup, and with a look of drunken wrath, half real, half assumed, fitfully shifted his fixed gaze from face to face, as if striving to detect and challenge the offensive cry on some individual tongue; but it was too general to be thus looked down, and the attendants of various degrees having become by this time sufficiently emboldened no longer to conceal the in-

terest they took in all that passed at their superiors' table, their voices were now added to the deafening shout of, "the wine!"—"the wine!"

Thus vigorously assailed, the unheeded anger of Father Mathieu, by degrees, gave place to a succession of most vigorous, if not eloquent, appeals to be heard : unfortunately his gesticulation was somewhat confined, from the circumstance of its having become essential to his just equilibrium, that one hand should be firmly planted upon the edge of the table, the better to sustain the giant bulk above, whilst the other described a series of irregular and rather confined figures before him.

"The wine! the wine!"—shouted the indignant Father, silence having been in part obtained. "What of the wine?—why this—I did receive certain wine, as yon babbler—whom a swelled tongue confound for a year and a day—has told ye."

"So ho, ho, ho!" gleefully shouted many voices.

Father Mathieu resumed. "What of that wine, ye seek to know? I'll answer ye—re-

probates that ye are—heedless, senseless sinners though ye be, ye shall be answered.

“ That wine was sent, and received for holy purposes ; and to such only has it hitherto been applied. I dare to suppose you'll allow that the poor rogue, who's good gift it is, has a soul, sinner though he be ;—now I have promised in requital for this, and sundry other charitable gifts of the knave's, to procure for him a pardon full and free, *ab omni paenâ et culpâ* ;—but think ye, that this grace can be had if his wine be swilled up at a wassail such as this ?

“ I am no churl, but a loyal and free trencher-mate as ever broke bread with his fellow ; and none can know that better than *he*, Ralph Rainer, who, together with young Cheat-the-gallows, his brother, there, has caused me to be so brayed at ;—had there been two good fellows met together, or even three, or four, or five, one might have strained a point, and emptied a demi-roundlet or so of the holy beverage, in sinful revel a-down throats profane ;—but in *this* company, to talk

of wine, and of such wine!—think ye I've no more brains than ye have bowels, to attempt your unslakeable thirst with my right Picardine?—what, would ye have me entrust spigot to the will of that huge sponge, Rainer? who boasts of having borne the good gift of poor Croquart from Rochelle. Marry had the sea running between, but been of wine, instead of brine, I'd 'a looked long for my share of his freight, for the rogue had drunk his ship a ground ere he got half passage.

“ But, out on ye, your tongues grow scurrious, your converse gets lewd and unfitted for pious ears, your wit is gone, your wine is out, there is no good in ye, and heaven must mend ye, for ye are past help of mine.”

So ending, the holy Father made a movement to depart; this was anticipated, and had been provided against, and in a moment he was secured by half a dozen ready hands, whilst two or three stout fellows, by signal, threw their whole weight upon his back; nor was less precaution needful, for the brawny strength of the Priest, when fully put forth, was prodigious.

Surprised though he was, the gallant Father made a brief but energetic struggle to shake off his assailants, until, finding himself fairly over matched, he sank into his seat, loudly confessing himself captured.

"Rescue, or no rescue?" demanded his captors; but it was not till after a second ineffectual struggle, that the prisoner agreed to this ungenerous condition, and had his limbs released.

The bustle attendant on this short fray subsided, the victors resumed their seats, and the sturdy Priest, disarmed by the stern tenure of his parole, sat, for a few moments, breathing short breath, in gloomy discomfiture.

"And on what terms may I be loosed from this cowardly surprisal?" he at last demanded, in the affectedly low tone of one who strives to school his spirit to a hard necessity.

"A ransom, a ransom!" shouted the jovial company of captors.

"Be gentle, bullies," continued the prisoner, in a tone intended to be deprecatory, "bear

not over hard on one, who has for so long borne the sins of most here, and with a patient spirit, considering that the burthen is such as few else could carry, without foundering.— Come, Cousin Conrade, it shall be thine, to name my ransom, since thou art, at this time, the soberest, as thou art, at all times, the wisest here.”

“ Content! content!” cried many voices, “ let Conrade name the ransom.”

“ Four-times the full of this jack, at the least,” bawled the merciless Rainer, in conclusion, elevating, as he spoke, a most awful looking measure, so called.

The subdued Father cast a rueful glance upon the speaker, then groaned audibly, but answered not a word.

“ My comrade, Rainer,” said Conrade, addressing the expectant board, “ has named but a small ransom for the liberty of one, too highly prized to be lightly parted, and who would be cheaply loosed at ten-times that amount.”

A second groan from the Priest was drowned amidst the loud cheer of approval which followed this wise estimate of his value.

"But, in respect of the pious plea of the prisoner, and out of our great love of his person, we here agree to receive a moiety of the ransom named by Rainer, on condition that the worthy Father himself shall return with the wine, and, in person, dispense it here forthwith; when we further promise, on our parts, forgiveness of the past, and, moreover, honourable escort to his quarters, an need be;—what say you, prisoner? will you subscribe to this?"

After some decent difficulties started, as to the propriety of his own return, and which were soon and eagerly over-ruled, as they were feebly defended, Father Mathieu declared himself satisfied with the terms decreed, and with an alacrity of movement, which ill accorded with the ludicrous solemnity of his look, at once departed, to procure the promised supply, attended by those of the company deputed to bear it in.

Back soon came these ministers of Bacchus, bearing the fresh libation, and headed by the giant Priest himself, who had, evidently, received a fresh lift by the way, and now looked like the jolly god, in person, when arrived at the height of inspiration ; by no voice was this joyous *entrée* more loudly hailed, than by the Father's own, who, with restored good-humour, now honestly presided over the ransom, so roughly exacted.

Their mirth henceforward closely trod upon the heels of riot ; song followed song, in uncalled for succession, and some of these proving of a nature to bring forth loud protestations from the Father, whose morality, as is not unusual, grew purer under the increasing influence of wine, he at last fairly bawled himself hoarse, in his pious efforts to drown the offensive sounds ; until, in the end, finding himself voiceless, and the evil unabated, he irefully rose, to enforce his ghostly counsel, with an arm of flesh, against the ever-offending Rainer, when, unhappily, losing his balance, he found a resting-

place, and quiet, upon mother earth, to which, when down, he clung with the tenacity of one who feared a yet further fall.

In fulfilment of the last condition of the treaty made between the gallant Priest and his ransomers, an honourable escort was now provided for him, in the persons of some half-dozen of the stoutest and soberest of the party, who, raising him on their shoulders, bore him, in unstable triumph, to his accustomed place of rest.

Conrade now perceived that the end he had in view was fully accomplished, and, giving his final directions to the elder Rainer, whose impenetrable head seemed little affected by the deluge he had drunk, he next set the example for a general break up ; and, in a short time, the dregs of the revel were left in possession of the herd of lower retainers, and a few of the men-at-arms, who, being under orders to mount at day-break, saw not good reason for going to bed. Of these, some sought the fire-side benches, and slept, whilst others were content to snatch such rest as

might be found where they sat, amidst the drunken efforts at harmony, made by the riotous crew, who, under the direction of the Rainers, in due time reduced the Saxon boatmen to a state, which left both them and their apparel absolutely at the disposal of their more designing companions.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"CIELO, son of mine, but thou art bravely accoutred, bright basinet, and iron-glove and glaive, hauberk, and haqueton—why what's afoot to-day? I heard the clink of thy spurs ere I rose, and after for a time marvelling what made thy tramp so heavy over head, next hoped thou hadst bestirred thee thus early to do my errand to the Lord Cardinal di Lucca, at Windsor, before first mass. But I am far out in my reckoning, by the look of thy gear, which is more fitting the tent of a warlike baron, than the *bottéga* of a peaceful *orefice*."

This greeting was uttered with a shrill voice, in a manner somewhat petulant, yet kindly, and in an accent evidently not English.

The speaker was Messer Andreas Borgia, a man of the age of some three score and five years, of a most diminutive stature, the which he contrived to lower yet more by a confirmed stoop, that robbed him of at least four inches out of the fifty-two, which composed the very utmost of his altitude.

The face of Messer Andreas—for it is necessary to be somewhat particular in his description—was thin and exceedingly shrivelled from the eyes downward, but happily redeemed from the miserly character this in a degree imparted to it when the head was covered, by a lofty brow, well arched and smooth, expressive of higher power and qualities more generous. His hair was long, lank, and trimly-shorn, and over its deep, dull black, time had as yet failed to sprinkle even his snows: neither were his eyes at all indicative of his years, for they were keen, clear, and lustrous as those of the youth, whom he now

addressed, and who stood modestly before him during his questioning, of a very different model from the relation who claimed him.

Leonardo, or, as he was familiarly named by his English associates, Len Borgia, was as handsome and as well made a youth as any within sound of St. Botolph's bell, yet never, surely, did physiognomy worse represent Italian birth or lineage ; for he was remarkably fair, his face more of a round than oval, his eyes blue, and his hair, which, according to the fashion of the times, he wore close cut in front, and trained to wave over the neck behind, was of a light, glossy brown.

Though not tall, his bearing was gallant, and his port, when in action, as lofty and as erect as the disarmed lance, which rested on two brackets projecting from the wall above him, and in quest of which, together with a small heart-shaped shield that hung beside it, the youth had entered this chamber, usually occupied as a sort of private studio, or work-room, by Messer Andreas.

Leonard had, in fact, supposed the old man

yet at rest, it being but little past day-break, and was in consequence something taken aback, when, having cautiously and noiselessly opened the door, he beheld the signore seated before his bench, quietly noting the stealthy turning of lock and hinge, and the tip-toe tread of his nephew; for such was the true degree of relationship between them, although the old man ever addressed him as *figlio*, or son.

"What wantonness does this masquerading denote for to-day, Leonardo, I again ask of thee?" continued the first speaker, "and what barbarous mummery art thou about to enact in that unseemly harness?"

The youth had recovered from his first surprise, during the brief interval of question, and now approaching his uncle, passed his right arm about the old man's neck, and seating himself on the bench beside him, playfully, but half reproachfully, replied—

"Nay, uncle, you know full well, though 'tis your humour thus to question me; was I not chosen for one of the City knights, by

Langbourne ward, on last Easter, and so bound to do service at this holyday meeting? This, sir, is the day appointed for the solemn pageant and high feast the City is to give the King, in honour of the Earl of Derby's great victories in France, and for the which you were pleased to direct such brave preparation; and I am uproused thus early to be betimes at our place of muster, by St. Andrew's Fields, for it would ill-beseem me who ought to set a brave example to my merry-men, to be myself this day dubbed slaggard knight.

“ See you, sir, the dawn is quickly growing to bright day, the sun is almost out of bed, and I would shame me to have his first beam on my basinet, at second hand, through a glazed window pane, on such a morning. So, if I am to ride at this mumming, give me frank benison, good uncle, and bid me go free, since I have disturbed you, which, trust me, I sought not to do, and am sorry for.”

“ Hah, *veramente*, I do believe thee, thou truant—thou wouldest have stolen forth, and left the old man to learn thy departure from

the clatter of thy wild horse's iron hoofs ! prodigal dolt, and senseless that I was, to purchase such a costly hobby for thee to break thy neck from off ! ”

“ Generous kinsman and kind master were ye, sir, to deal so nobly by your poor nephew and servant : for never was belted baron better mounted than will be Leonardo Borgia, at this day's running ; thanks and blessings on the free hand and generous heart that I owe this to, and much more, besides, than I can ever hope to repay .”

And as the youth concluded his thanks, in a tone which bespoke the verity of his feelings, he pressed his aged relative within his arms, with a force rather proportioned to his own measure of gratitude, than to the power of resistance the old man's frame was calculated to offer.

It would have provoked a smile from a looker on, to have observed the contrast presented by the shrimp-like person and sallow shrivelled visage of the half-pleased, half-angered signore, to the panoplied figure which

sustained, and the beaming face which bent over him.

"Nay, loose me, son," he at length found breath to exclaim, "cry a-mercy, boy, thou hast the hug of a bear of Savoy, and forgettest that I am but brittle ware to strain against that steel corazzo of thine. But tell me now, of a verity, dost thou think so much of that same beast, Leonardo? Does he so fully content thee, and agree with thy liking?"

And this demand of Messer Andrea's was most fondly and fearfully put; "But, i'faith," he continued, not waiting for an answer, "it is a most noble looking steed, but fiercer in his raised mood than a goaded bull: think'st thou art quite master of his humours, Leo?"

The youth smiled, whilst the nervous querist resumed, more hastily.

"Aye, aye! 'tis well to smile, but an thy neck be jeopardied, 'tis no jest to me: not but I know the cunning of thy hand in such matters; and, faith, thou shouldst be truly taught, or else my countryman, Messer Giovanni Carvalho, has been but too well paid for

his *maneggio*; but I know thee, also, to be over bold, and sudden in thy handling—and, bethink thee, Caro Leo," continued the anxious old man, preventing his nephew's answer, his tenderness growing with the apprehensions he was conjuring up, "bethink thee, the brute hath Arab blood in him! 'tis a steed of Egypt, boy, a pagan steed, and may ill endure the emblem of this Christian city, which thou hast gotten so gaily 'broidered on thy silken' cyclas. Ha! of true gold, too, knave!" cried the old man, looking more curiously on the City's badge, which the youth wore, richly emblazoned on his cyclas, or surcoat, "costly fooling, boy—costly fooling!" he muttered, with a grave shake of the head, "a rare note Master Watts will serve me with, for this thrice-laid finery!"

"Tush, sir, never doubt but I'll make my Mahound destrier bear this cross," replied the youth, answering the first query, and wisely waving the second; "aye, and bear it full meekly, too, or my pryck-spur shall teach him Christian courtesy; but 'tis idle folly to speak

thus of the gallant Soldan, who is so truly mouthed, that a child's hand on a string of silk, would as surely guide him as iron glove on a guarded bridle-rein. So fare ye well, dear sir, or will you forth and see me mount?"

"I will, I will, see thee to thy saddle," cried the old man, rising nimbly; "but stay, hast yet broken fast, Leo?"

"Trust me, uncle, I took heed to that whiles I armed me. I got Martha in the mind to make due preparation last night, and lacked not time this morn, for Cyril woke me before day-break."

"And me also; the knave would make but an unquiet chamber-groom, for he treads heavier than the horses he tends—howbeit, I am well pleased it is so, for I shall now see thee forth in all thy bravery, since go thou wilt; but hark thee, Leo, an this beast be not tame and docile at the mounting, thou wilt much pleasure me by not riding him to this fool's sport to-day, but take in his stead thy old nag to use, which knows, and is known to thee, whilst I will be well content to pay

Messer Giovanni, to teach this stranger true Christian pacing."

"I tell you, uncle," calmly answered the youth, "I know as much of Carvalho's craft as he knows himself; have, the saints be praised, as bold a heart, as true a hand, and as cool a head, and there needs not more, uncle, to manage beast or man. Besides, Soldan's quality and mine have once already been fairly mated, although you knew it not, for I coursed him in the ring at the Tower fields, and gave him a free gallop from the Minories cross, over the flats, to East-minster, and back, before the sea captain brought him to you. I told you not of this at the time, for well I knew you would hold me to blame for my pains."

"And right well didst thou earn it, varlet of mine; hah! thou hadst tried the steed, and yet could look so meekly in his mouth, and question the groom so mincingly of his temper and action, forsooth—thou art a knave, Leo, and dealest too much with thy foolish old uncle!"

"Only where sleight may happily save you a minute's pain, trust me, sir," replied the youth, "if I could deal, or use falseness or cunning for any worse end with one so true and kind, I should well merit to lose my right hand under hangman's axe."

"My brave boy, my noble boy!" exclaimed the old man, whilst tears of affection filled his eyes. "Go forth, and God be with thee, but be not over-bold, even for my sake; and thou hast tried this steed, and hast rule over him? Well, I'm glad of it, but it was a mad course of thine—and didst thou not fear his fierce stirrings and wild looks, Leonardo?"

"Fear him, signor!" replied the young citizen, whilst the colour went from his brow. "Fear him!—no, marry, did I not; nor do I now; nor any that may come against him: I tell you, uncle, put but iron head on this lance shaft, Soldan under me, and a fair, free course before us, and I would fight a king's battle on his back, to be dealt with to the uttermost, and that too with less of fear than I have often felt

to note you watching over me as I've sought to deepen your tracing on a silver drinking cup."

Whilst speaking, the youth had lifted from the wall the disarmed lance, and the shield which hung beside it, and now hastily took his way down a long passage leading to the offices in the rear of the house.

"Nay, talk not so hotly, Leonardo," loudly cried Messer Andreas, nimbly following, "though of a truth thou mayst well have felt affeared to have my eyes on thy work, for thou hast but small cunning in the craft, seeing that 'tis now nigh seven years since thou wert bound to our good neighbour, Master Dukin heigho! I paid largely to have thy service made over to me, whilst he held thy indenture, so that I might make thee citizen, and yet have thy bringing up. Alas! poor boy, my care has not much advanced thee after all, and did any ill chance to thy old uncle, I often fear me, Leo, thou wouldst be hard set to live, since of thy craft thou assuredly knowest nougnt."

"Fear not for me, sir," said Leonard, stopping suddenly on the steps leading into the court-yard, and speaking in a tone somewhat indignant but subdued—"I have learnt some trick of a trade that will stand me in stead whilst I last, and which love for you alone has held me from following these two years back."

Leonard having thus spoken was making towards the stable, when the old man, startled by these ominous sounds, caught his hand and held him back, crying in a tone of voice tremulously eager—

"Talk not so, Caro Leo—talk not so: I know, too well I know, what thou dreamest of—thou wouldst be a soldier, a mercenary hobbeler archer, or a man-at-arms—hired to cut throats at a groat a day! Alas! alas! what shame wouldst thou bring upon me?—thou, that hast had such gentle rearing, to be banded under the pennon of that untaught savage, Roger le Barbazon, or forced to do the cruel bidding of Humphry of Wodeham, who only in the last war rode with one hundred lances,

ten miles east and west, from Cassel to Ardres, and a like distance north and south, from Ardres to Bourthies, and after, made high boast that he and his chivalry left not breathing thing alive on the whole of that broad line, saving only the birds of the air and the fish of the stream, which Providence had happily put beyond the reach of their murderous weapons !

“ Couldst thou have aided in such cruelty as this, Leonardo ?—thou, who hast a shrewd touch of clerkly lore, and knowest the philosophy of antique times ; and yet, thou must needs have played thy part, hadst thou ridden in such evil company ! ”

“ That was a cruel infall of Sir Humphry’s, doubtless,” observed the youth, with about as much of pity in his tone as might become a modern squire on hearing of a poor man’s corn being destroyed by his fox-hounds ; for custom had rendered such bloody deeds but too common. “ Although these borderers had broken faith with King Edward’s ally, and

given harbour to his foes, yet was the Baron's vengeance too heavy on the poor knaves, churls though they were."

"Alas! my son," mournfully replied the pitiful Andreas; "speak not so lightly of so cursed a cruelty; were not those peasants men, husbands, and fathers? What better claim have we to security—for think not we are held at a higher rate—no; *we* are but churls in the eyes of these proud men, and are protected only by our walls, our numbers, and the great need they have of our industry, our intelligence, and our wealth: within these gates, it is true, we may beard the best of them, an he would do us wrong: the proudest amongst them will think twice ere he does open injury to a citizen of this great city; and that have I made thee, Leonardo; trust me, it is a gentler title in honest ears than that of body-lance to the best knight that ever raised square bannerol, even wert thou so favoured as to gain such a degree."

The youth reddened for shame at this humiliating picture, which was doubly galling to

his proud spirit, because he felt compelled to admit its correctness.

For whatever courtesies might be exercised towards the City magnates on solemn occasions, and however flattering the privileges might sound to which they were entitled within their own boundaries, it was at the same time no less true that to these they were strictly limited. They might, in holiday-time, assume knightly names, and gentle panoply—nay, their haughty superiors encouraged these mockeries; condescended often to witness their festivity; took the high places at their feasts; and looked with grudging eyes upon their shew of goodly gear there. True, also, they might ride at Quentin, in Smithfield; draw bow at Newington; and hunt in Middlesex forest; yet rarely might craftsmen, however wealthy, hope to win honour in arms, or look ever to inscribe his humble name upon the roll of chivalry.

The gold-worker read what was passing in the mind of his aspiring nephew, and after a moment's pause, continued—

“ Content thee then, my son, content thee

with thy estate, and trust me 'tis the better; I did but jest when I spake of thy needing to labour, think not of it more; I will take heed of thy fortunes, I am wealthy, exceeding wealthy, and were not my gentle craft a pleasure to me, have small call to follow it.

“ When I indentured thee apprentice, I never meant to have thee a drudge, nor canst thou say I ever sought to make thee such; I did it more to secure to thee this city's freedom, which I had oftentimes felt the lack of, than for any meaner end or 'vantage; and this thou well knowest.

“ Then threaten not, Leonardo, to turn hireling soldier, when I am no more; for were I deep buried, I should burst cere-cloth and lead with very shame at thy debasement. But thou art gentle and good, my son, and wilt promise me to think no more on't—trust me I ne'er will die in peace till thou dost so promise, Leonardo.”

Messer Andreas had, in the earnestness of this appeal, drawn both his nephew's hands within his own; and now clasping them to his

breast, he bent his eyes upon the face of the youth, as with trembling solicitude, he awaited his reply.

It was evident that passions varied and masterful were striving within the breast of him that listened here, as with an averted head, eyelids drawn down, close compressed lips, and distended nostrils, he stood, haughty and erect before the diminutive personage speaking, who, whilst addressing him, as above, had rather the air of a suppliant appealing to his offended superior, than an uncle and master, advising with his dependant nephew, and bond-servant.

As the speaker concluded, Leonardo bent his head slowly towards him, and with a look and manner, in which affection and gratitude were slightly tainted by an expression too nigh akin to contempt, he strove to reassure his alarmed companion.

“ Nay, content you, mine uncle,” he said ; “ I did but too hastily giv● free vent to unadvised speech, fuller of sound than of meaning : trust me I will break this stubborn heart, ere it shall heat my wilfulness to any act, that

may bring one hour of shame or sorrow to yours, which is so overfilled with love for one who so little merits it as myself.

“ I will say no more now, for I have heard the tramp of more than one horse pass westward whilst we have stood here, and I would not be waited for at this game, fool's play though it be ; but trust me after this turn, I will no more of it; for you are right, it is little less than insanity, for the drudge of a turn-broche to seek to ape the trick of the noble stag-hound, when, let him become never so stanch or fleet, he may not seek to be laid on in free-field, but at best can only look to be loosed from his chain with every other city cur to fill up the cry at a holiday hunt ;—but, pshaw, no more of this—see where your knaves stand marvelling at my tardiness, with mouths agape, and their long ears painfully on the pryck, to catch word of our long parley.

“ Ho, Jocelin !” he now called, addressing one of a couple of stout fellows, who stood by the stable door opposite, daintily tricked forth in bright red Courtray hose, and shirts of hol-

land, tied up the breast by points of red silk, with plated tags, and wearing with a knowing set, blue Monmouth caps bearing the City's cross neatly emblazoned in silver on a shield-shaped rosette.

“ Jocelin, good fellow, do you bring Soldan forth; and, Cyril, set you open the gates—how's the morning?—are we not something of the latest, think you?”

“ Marry and we've so thought, a good while agone, Master Leonard,” replied the younger groom, as he crossed towards the gate—continuing as he drew back the bolts—“ 'Tis good time this were open, an it would'n't be beat down, for it hath been thrice stricken by the lance truncheons of as many passing riders; and look where the sun is to be seen, almost over the roof of Fan-church.”

At this moment Jocelin made his appearance, from the stable, with a short hold on the rein of the well caparisoned Soldan; and, as the noble animal sought to free himself of this restraint, and snuffing the fresh air of morning, playfully smote the ground with

eager foot, and, tossing his head, impatiently neighed out a gallant challenge, there was a devil in his fiery glance, might well have startled a nervous horseman.

Leonard regarded his horse with eyes full of gratified pride and admiration, as he, smilingly, approached his head ; whilst Messer Andreas, with a fearful intensity of look, loudly besought him to use caution, at the same time endeavouring, by a circuitous movement, to approach as close as might be safe, in his judgment, to the chafing cause of his alarm ; this, the frequent shiftings of the eager animal, as Leonardo gently, but carefully, examined the condition of his gear, from bit to girth, and from girth to crupper, rendered no easy matter. At last, after various echelon and direct movements, sidelings and retreatings, all of which were performed with an agility more ludicrous than respectable, the old man fairly esconced himself within the porch of the stables, and, with the door almost closed, from thence continued his observation.

“ Hath Gilbert been here ? ” demanded

Leonard of Cyril, in half whisper, as he prepared to put his foot in the sautour, or stirrup.

"Not that we ha' heard of," replied the groom, "and 'tis barely within belief for him to pass nearer than a mile, and not be heard."

"He is worse than naught," said the cavalier, fretfully, "and I but little better, to have let him talk me into choosing him for my body-squire; I'll wager this new dudgeon to any carter's whittle, that the tailoring lout is yet cross-legged, at some fanciful overlarding of the doublet I sent him yester eve. I did not think he would have played loose with me, either; but come, lads, don your coats, and let us forth as bravely as we may."

As he spoke the last sentence, he rose, like a dart, from the ground, and took saddle, with a firmness and precision that would have better beseemed courtly knight than City apprentice. And now arrived the very consummation of Messer Borgia's terrors.

"Hah! see you this?" he cried out, upon the first skittish fling of the horse. "So,

Leo, so ! what wantonness ! thou wilt be kill-ed ! What, ho ! *scendête*—light thee down, Leonardo, I command thee—I pray thee, light thee down ! Close-to the gates, knaves ; let him not forth on the *cattiva béstia*—this demon, that is surely spell-cast to destroy Christian riders, how came he here else ? O, I was witched, to buy the pagan ! So, so, so ! gently, Leo : so, sooth and humour him, in God's name, but pryck him not, for well I know high blood ill brooks rough guiding : I have learned that lesson !” half muttered the Signóre, to himself, with a melancholy shrug.

These hurried exclamations were called forth by the first movements of the spirited beast, who, feeling his head freed from the groom's somewhat heavy handling, and that he was lightly backed, flung himself forward, with the sudden and elastic leap of a loosed deer ; this half playful trial, the suddenly tightened rein at first converted into a fierce effort to shake off all restraint, by wild plunging and rearing, intermixed with occasional boundings,

which threatened, at times, to overspan the ample area of the court-yard.

But Soldan was happily backed by his equal in spirit, and the youth now proved that he had not over commended his horsemanship, when he boasted a master's knowledge ; his seat was not to be shaken, whilst his hand, strong, yet delicate, fully restrained, without over chafing the proud horse, until, in a few moments, he had entirely reclaimed him to that state of discipline in which he was most perfectly trained, and, indeed, rarely departed from, except during a momentary outbreak of high spirits, or under strange guiding, as at present.

“ Fear not, uncle,” cried Leonard, after making the conquered beast change foot and canter quietly in the demi-circle ; “ you see you may approach now without startling him ; this is the second trial we have made of each other, and I'll pawn the peacock I intend this day to win, that we are excellent comrades evermore. Nay, come near, sir ; he will not

now move foot : see how lovingly he reaches forth his head, as if to do homage and greeting to his good master."

"Out ! call me not so, Leo," cried the old man ; "I am no master of his ; I'd as soon think of claiming seignory over the true Soldan himself, as mastery over his four-footed namesake here."

Messer Andreas had by this time, however, ventured within reach of his nephew's hand, whilst the horse stood fixed as a statue, and pressing it again and again within his own, he articulated fervently and cheerfully—

"Heaven bless thee, my son ! go forth to thy disportings, since needs must be ; but deal cautiously with thy most precious safety, for my sake, I pray thee."

The two men had now don'd their coats, and right brave coats they were, being of white cloth of Bruges, wove from the finest English wool, made low in the throat, drawn tight upon the breast by points of silk, the same bright colour as the hose, and falling full over the

hips ; the sleeves were of a fashion peculiar to this time, as in order to afford free play to the arms, these were not sewn round the shoulder of the jerkin, but fastened instead by points such as bound the front, and not drawn so close but that the shirt might well protrude through the spaces. They were unguarded, or plain, except that on the back and breast was embroidered richly the cognizance of the City. Each man bore a short-bladed sword unsheathed, in the left side of his girdle, and on the right a sheaf of arrows of true Norman measurement : their bows, which were gaily painted, they carried with a loose string in their hands ; and thus accoutred, stood ready to run by the side of their young master.

“ But where is thy body squire, Leo, my son ? ” enquired Messer Andreas, as he cautiously moved in a line parallel with the group towards the open gate. “ I surely gave word for three suits—one for each of these good knaves, also another, which was to have been guarded handsomely with silk of Florence, for thy

squire. Tell me, didst thou make choice of young Joseph Mason, as I hinted was my desire: he is a good, kind lad, and a gentle?"

"Aye faith, is he, uncle; good and kind enough, but over gentle, I fear me, to follow the leader of to-day's play—not that I chose the wiser, for I was overruled by the rogue's glib tongue, and a smack of liking, and named Gilbert Hawkwood for my squire; but he has had some mischance I doubt, since here he is not."

"Better so," quickly answered Messer Andreas, "I'm glad of it!—I'm right glad of it, Leonard; 'tis a wild knave, that Gilbert, with a head ever putting him into more jeopardy than his own hands can well free him out of. I hope he is safe for this day, and, trust me, thou art well quit of him; not but I could have desired to have thee full manned, but that may not be mended now; so forth, in heaven's name; and speed ye well home, and not over late, for I shall have ill-ease till thou art safe housed here again, Leonard."

The kind old man was closing-to the gate, as he uttered these last words, and, as his young kinsman saluted him, at parting, by lowering the point of the dis-armed lance he bore, his eyes glistened with a tear of pride and apprehension mingled, and turning away, he exclaimed, aloud—

“There goes he forth, with the bearing of a prince, and a pulse that beats as highly, as though it had never been steadied down to the guidance of a graving tool, or his hand grasped meaner weapon than the glaive by his side.

“Would,” he continued, in a lower tone, “would that I could learn the trick to make him pace as evenly as he guides that wild beast, now under his saddle. But there—’tis a vain wish, I might as well think to abide on that beast’s back during the maddest of his escapadoes.

“Ah, Messer Andreas! ’twas a witless thought of thine, to choose such a toy to fix thy heart upon, and every day tells me that truth, the stronger as it comes too late.

"To seek to tame Leonard down into a sober citizen, is as bootless an aim as it would be to train the main ocean to turn a flour mill, or that Arab war-horse, to amble mincingly under a ladye's whirlecote."

## CHAPTER IX.

ON leaving the gateway of the court-yard, which opened into Lombard Street, Leonard proceeded at a more sober pace than, in the mind of his followers, accorded with the nature of their errand, and of this, their opinion, they strove to give him some hints, any thing but indirectly conveyed.

After sundry whistlings, coughings, and questions as to the probable “hour o’ the day,” asked and answered from the opposite sides of the way at an expense of lungs by no means called for by the distance or other obstacle to hearing, none of which hints pro-

duced either notice or effect on their thoughtful companion—Cyril, by right of his seniority, and perhaps because he was most deeply interested, having been entered as one of those chosen to sustain the City's archery against all England, upon that day, being confessedly one of the best bows in Middlesex, ventured upon a more positive impeachment of his master's speed ; advancing to the off-side of Soldan, who seemed to have caught his rider's humour, and minced his steps over the rough road like a lady's palfrey, the stout groom laid his hand on the beast's crest, saying :—

“ You had best use more speed, master, or we shall be waited for past all patience ; 'tis later than you think by the look of the street, for not a soul do we meet, and a full hour since there was the sound of many, both walkers and runners, hurrying eastward.”

Leonard started at this interruption, and turning his look upon the man, who still retained his position, patting the arched neck of the charger, replied good humouredly, rather

to this action than to the fellow's speech, the which he had hardly heard.

" You are right, Cy, he hath a noble neck, and as much bone for a light limb as any horse from west or east."

Slightly pressing his horse's sides with either leg as he spoke, the well managed beast performed two or three volts in rapid succession with the lightness and gentleness of a sportive fawn, and again settled down into his measured walk ; such tricks of the *manége* being, at this period, in high estimation, formed an essential part in the education of every thorough paced war-horse.

The astonished groom looked for a minute into the face of his master, but it had already resumed the thoughtful expression out of which his voice had for an instant roused it ; the man then gave a hopeless nod of the head, and crossing to his comrade, Jocelin, half whispered—

" Saint Job, but we must ha' patience, for he's in his moods again : marry mend his brain

for he gets as maggotty as a Manx poney,  
corn-fed.

“He’s sure heart-hurt by some young damsel, and too bashful to bespeak her! for naught for certain but love could so addle the wits of a man.”

“Tush! thou art a simpleton, Jos, and thinkest every man’s pudding made o’ thy meal, ever since the dainty fingers o’ that jilflirt, Martha Bartlett, hath tickled thy gills, like a simple gudgeon as thou art, to be so ass-led.”

“Say thou no light word of Martha Bartlett,” retorted the hot youngster, grasping his bow menacingly, “or I’ll lend thee a crack on the wrist shall spoil thy string-hand for this day’s shooting; but tell me, in sooth, ince thou art so wise, what has thus bewildered young Leonard, that, till this last year, was wont to be the sprightliest among the most sprightly, and the foremost among the most forward?”

“Nay, now thou hast posed me, for though I’ll swear ‘tis not a woman that hath so be-

wildered him, yet will I not promise to say what hath. The first time I ever saw sign of it was on the eve of last Easter Monday, the very day, of all others, when he ran for the prize at Quentin, and after had the best of young Audeley, one of the King's esquires, in two courses, and so bore off the sword given by the City to the ablest jouster. On the very eve of that day, I mind me, the Westminster louts made a cry on the City, beat down every lantern, and stoned every window that came in their way from Temple Bar to East-chepe ; there the City boys began to make head, and ' staves and targets' was the cry. Knowing Leonard to be mostly the forwardest where blows were changing, I guessed him at his books may be, and not heedful of the ruffle, so took down his staff and target, and made through to his chamber ; there he sat, looking just as he does now, with his head bent over his knees, and as hard of hearing as a mill-horse. Well, at last I made him know what was a-foot ; and what, think ye, was my thanks ? ' Make out,' said he, ' an

ye will, but trouble not me ; there be sure  
hinds enow to cudgel hinds' hides without my  
striking blow in their brawl ; and out he  
packed me, with just so much for my pains,  
and no more.

" The last May-day he neither joined jous-  
ter nor dancer, tho' some of the best timbrels  
played, and some of the lightest feet leaped in  
old Borgia's court ; nor do I think he has been  
thrice at the ring since, or would have stirred  
in this day's pageant, had he not been chosen  
for one of the knight-riders, and prycked to it  
by the old man himself, who, little as he likes  
blows, even in sport, still less relished these  
melancholic humours of his kinsman, and yet  
thou seest, bravely as he is set forth, it seems  
little to pleasure him."

This guess of honest Cyril's was, in very  
sadness, the truth ; and although, when on  
that morning awakened at grey dawn, he had  
risen with something of his ancient alacrity of  
spirit, and armed him for the part he looked so  
gallantly, the interview with his uncle had, de-  
spite his efforts, and the lightness of his part-

ing words, produced a serious change in his mood, which, being here freed from observation, he was at no pains to suppress or to control.

The words spoken by the elder Borgia, were uttered partly in earnest, but more through the querulous habit of old age, and a pettish jealousy, not unnatural in such a person, when he saw the object of his love engaged, and, seemingly, absorbed in pursuits and pleasures with which he had been unfitted, by nature, to hold the smallest sympathy; yet had they, by chance, fallen into the very wound of his young kinsman's spirit, forgotten, for the moment, but scarce skinned over, and now torn rudely open, to fester, with added pain.

Again and again the youth revolved in his mind the expressions of contumely so heedlessly uttered—his memory supplying each bitter sentence with singular fidelity, and with that vivid truth with which a sensitive mind tenaciously retains and recalls the very tone and syllabbling of the words that have wounded it.

The sorrowful expression of his features had, by degrees, darkened into a fixed and settled gloom, which, even the frequent kind greeting flung to him, failed to dissipate, for the party was now passing down the Chepe, and on either hand of the way might be seen busied, such of the elder domestics and inhabitants, chiefly females, who feared to encounter the crush ; or, having seats secured, had not yet departed.

These were attending to, and completing the outer decoration of their houses ; for, after the games at Kennington, King Edward and the young Prince, his son, were to accompany the Lord Mayor back to London, and at six o'clock sup in the Guildhall, together with the Queen, attended by all the beauty and chivalry of the court ; and nothing was neglected on the citizens' part that might do honour to a monarch, who, despite his heavy exactions, was highly popular amongst all his subjects, and more especially with the Londoners, whom, indeed, he delighted to honour, and

whose privileges he had frequently confirmed and greatly enlarged.

Ropes heavily laden with sweet scented May, and such other rarer flowers as the few and scantily furnished gardens of this rude time supplied, were passed over head from the opposite sides of the way : gaily painted lanterns of paper were also suspended from these garlands, as well as from the extremities of the lofty cross of Chepe ; and from the four corners of the Conduit, which, turned from its humble use, was so managed, that during the King's passage it should run with wine, hung other lanterns of yet more costly make, being composed of highly polished horn, or oiled silk, covered with transparencies ; some of painted glass, even, might be seen hanging conspicuously from poles projected out of the windows of the wealthier folk, together with rich tapestries, curious paintings from Rome, velvets from Genoa, and carpets from the distant heathen countries watered by the Euphrates and the Tigris :

the very names of which were unknown to the people, whose wealth at this early age, made the most distant lands tributary to their luxury and love of splendour.

Lower down, suspended from the spacious balconies, or displayed on boards placed for the purpose, might be discerned great store of vessels and drinking cups, of brass and silver, and some of gold, all skilfully wrought, and curiously embossed with rare devices; whilst, mingled with these, stood pieces of armour of every kind, both for protection and defence. Bundles of bow-staves, with the strings attached, sheafs of good arrows, ready for the bow, stacks of lance-shafts, with bright steel piles, twelve inches long, together with swords, axes, and daggers of every form and kind which an age most inventive in weapons of destruction could supply, and all of as rare good workmanship as money could procure.

Many a baron might gaze with envy on the bright breast and back pieces, basinet, and cervelliere, vambrace, and cuises, shield and war-

saddle, which stood thus oddly mingled before the door of the citizen, with the yet more tempting household stuff this harness seemed to intimate their masters' ability and determination to guard ; a hint which was by no means unnecessary, whilst displaying such wealth to the greedy eyes of the lawless aristocracy of these times, and the needy and reckless followers who formed their state, ever ready to do the most desperate bidding of their lords—the more ready where plunder was in view.

Here and there, too, from behind all this finery, might be observed a group of smiling faces, unhooded, and not yet wholly prepared for the killing effect it was their fixed purpose hereafter to produce on the gazer.

Many a shy glance was aimed from behind the half-drawn curtain or tapestry, at the young cavalier and his sturdy attendants, who passed so tardily along ; by most such, he was at once recognized, despite his garniture of war ; for the handsome nephew of the wealthy old Borgia was no mean person in most eyes, however lightly he held himself, and

would hardly have passed unnamed any where within the City's walls.

Had he been vain, or lightly moved, Leonard had no lack of occasion on this morn, for ever and anon might his ears have been tickled with honied commendations of both himself and his horse, uttered in any thing but whispers.

“ See ye ! see here, mistress ! ” cried a buxom tire-woman to her master’s pretty daughter, whom she left to deck herself, while she gaped at the passers through the window of a lofty gable, whose fantastically-adorned balconies rose stage above stage, until the heads of the hideous angels, who with expanded wings sustained the topmost gallery, abutted half across the street : “ see where goes young Len Borgia—a blessing on his sweet face ! he’s the first rider I have seen this morn ; and she must be ill to please that would seek for a fairer.

“ He’s for the joust to-day. Oh ! how I’d like to see him course before the King ! Marry, he must sit fast, an all be true that’s said, who carries the prize, and young Leonard in the lists.”

"How gallantly he bears rein, and how knightly!" observed her companion: "one might swear he had truly won the spurs he wears so bravely—a full feather from the peacock's tail an thou carriest it, Leonard! thou shalt have my God-speed, any way."

"Marry and mine!" echoed the ready Abigail; thrusting her neck from the window to give force to her God-speed.

These, together with many yet more openly expressed wishes for his success, praises of his horse, and friendly cautions for his own guidance, on the part of the lookers on, or passers by, accompanied the whole of his course.

The impression these kind feelings was so well calculated to make on the spirits of one so young, had been but lightly held by Leonard at most times; but on this, wholly failed to touch his heart, or rouse it from the sadness with which his uncle's gallful words had tainted it.

Thus slowly he rode down the Chepe by Newgate shambles, till passing through this gate he emerged from the City walls, and in-

clining northward, descended through a narrow lane leading down Snow-hill ; hence the view over Old-bourne-bridge, and the fields and forest beyond, was intercepted by a large group of dwelling-houses, which, closely congregated, extended across the line of road leading westward, having in their front the conduit and bridge of Old-bourne : just as he had turned these buildings he was roused from his reveries by the near approach of a hardly-ridden horse, and immediately recognized the person of his squire, Gilbert Hawkwood, who, gaily appointed and well mounted, was seen galloping towards him down the opposite hill.

“ Why, Len ! ” shouted the good-humoured, hare-brained, and most un-tailor-like of tailors’ apprentices, breathed with the haste he had used—“ Why, Leonard ! what, in the name of the devil and St. Dunstan, has held ye back so long, and guides ye now at such a snail’s pace ? ”

“ What, but loitering for thee, most ungrateful of squires ! ” replied Leonard, marvelling to observe that Gilbert did really come

from the direction of the fields lying opposite St. Andrews, and at the same time striving, at the sound of his comrade's voice, to shake off the chagrin he well knew would probably subject him to a species of raillery he was at any time ill inclined to bear, but more especially now.

" Nay, draw again honest bowman, for that shaft flies wide," retorted Gilbert, with a grin of incredulity : " why, man, I've been by the burn-fields this half hour and more : I passed thy door, but finding it fast barred, and hearing no stir, I made sure thou wert beforehand with me, as, indeed, thou shouldst have been ; so gave the old gates of Borgia a rattle with my truncheon, that made hinge, bolt, and bar, squeal again, and spurred by to find myself and many more on the ground before you, that should ha' been first by good rights. I forged a lie to quiet the grumblers, in a minute, and swore roundly 'twas no fault of yours, and that you'd ridden to meet the Marshal in Smithfield, sending me forward to abide the muster ; I had just done, and was rounding

the matter glibly off, when, as the fiend should guide it, a yet longer lie-a-bed, Hornby Snailfoot, came in at the end—stood me out that you were yet within the City walls, for that in passing by Lombard-street he had spoken Cyril, who told him how you were held back by your uncle, that had gotten you in parley, but would doubtless loose you soon.”

“This was untimous news, Gilbert,” said Leonard, smiling at the simplicity with which Hawkwood related this defeat of his effrontery: “Hornby’s tale squared but ill with thy veracious excuse; and how did thy wit serve in the pinch?”

“Marry, not at all! I was, for a minute, utterly abashed and confounded by the lout’s contradiction; the knaves were too surly to be joked with, an I had been so inclined, and I too ill set to jest.”

“Why what said they on it then?”

“What said they? Umph, why more than was civil, or might have proved safe, had you been by. At last, however, the upshot was,

that Joyce Rawlins swore 'twould be crying shame for Langbourne ward to be last in place, and further said, that he would bide no longer, but lead forward, let who would follow, or who would wait."

"'Twas stoutly said of Rawlins, and what came next?"

"More smoke, but little fire ; I stood to it, by cross and cup, that if he, or any better man, moved foot without word from our lawful leader, I would stay their gallop till such time as the matter were argued bodily with me."

"Well, what on this ? Did Joyce keep his word?"

"By St. George did he, and frankly ; an I'd a kept mine too, but that there were more stood between than I could well manage single handed; till, in the middle of our bluster, up came one of the Marshal's Serjeants, to say we were waited for, at the Elms, to have our place ordered. So I was fain to be smoothed down, to seek what mischance had

befallen you, and fair words were given that your right should be held for you till your coming up.

"But, now you're found, in the Saint's name let us use some speed; for, though I would not own to half as much, before the knaves that grew rusty on it, 'tis something over shameful to be so slack afoot on such a day, and for thee too of all others."

"I own my shame, Gilbert," said Leonard, in a tone of calm bitterness, and, after a moment's pause of apparent indetermination, "I confess to it freely; I am unworthy this leading I was chosen to, have forfeited my place, and will abide the penalty. Go, Hawkwood, ride thee back to these haut mummers, and warn them to hold me no longer as their Knight, since I will neither lead, nor ride in their company, neither now nor ever, but shall leave lance, spur, and pennon to those privileged to wear such trappings, and henceforth betake me to hammer, chasing tool, and apron, as an honest craftsman should."

“Hey, up for Brentford !” cried the astounded Hawkwood, “ whew ! but here’s a breeze. Why Len, Leonard Borgia, I say, art mad, witch-ridden, and utterly moonstruck, to rave in such a wasp-bitten fashion about naught ; and turn tail, so craven-like, because Joyce Rawlins hath ta’en thy leading ? St. Mary ! before I’d give inch to such an unlicked calf-head as he, I’d pull on a white bonnet, and Holland jerkin, and cry hot meat, in Cook’s lane, for life !”

“ Tush, Gilbert ! prate no word to me of Joyce Rawlins ; seeing thou well knowest how high I prize doing of his, and that, were it in company with my present humour, I’d think it light venture to thrust him from his place, any foot of the way between Southwark and Kennington—aye, and keep it too, against him, and all the brawlers that bark on his side ; but, truth to say, I am too ill at ease to enact these tricks of gentlesse—the which, God knows, some of us ape most clumsily—before the courtly scoffers that await our mumming this day, at Kennington, and will, therefore,

take no part in it more—neither now, nor in time to come.”

“Why thy humours grow past all understanding, good Leonard,” cried Hawkwood, absolutely agape with wonderment, and utterly unable to comprehend the feelings which gave rise to such wild speech; “thou wilt not ride in our pageant, for fear of a court gibe, neither now nor for ever. Thou wilt not take thy place in the joust, and that, through very terror of the smile of some belted chitterling of quality, who would no more change blow with thee, than he would try a fall with old Gog o' Guildhall, an he could step bodily into the wrestling ring! Thou afeared to be mocked—*thou*, the crack lance of London city, that didst last Easter, with some months' less pith in thy bones, ride two free courses against Lord James Audeley of Werk, and bore him back over his horse's croup, as tho' he'd been a Quentin o' withy!

“Come, come, Len, ye do but jest with me; fling by this spleen; give thy brave horse free rein—our company have ridden over by the

Pens, and if we make a cut here through Cow-lane, we may head them ere they are well out of Smithfield ; or an thou wilt rather, let us turn back and wait their coming at the bridge-foot, where the Stock-fishmonger company, which is to furnish the four Paynium kings, and their black-avysed knights and earls, will join the pageant.

" Oh ! Leonard, but they're rare dresses ! old Master Staytape had the making on them, and kept it all snug and secret as a priest's wooing : till last eve Bob Collyer, his head cutter and trimmer, and whose brains found both the wit and the device that old Staytape's had never yielded an they'd been cudgelled till doomsday, had me in, and shewed me all the trickery on't.

" Never was such finery seen out of the east country, and all fashioned after the right manner ; for when Bob was there, in the train of Simon d'Ingraville, he, as thou knowest—for he's told it often enough—was taken prisoner by the Saracens at Askalon, and kept a year and a day, and won much honour amongst

the Paynim knights and squires ; till at last, as he swears, he got both liberty and great largess, through making a pourpointerie for the haut Soldan himself, which stopped the course of a cloth-yard Lincoln arrow, after it had broke way through both his shield and the links of his steel jazarunt ; so that, but for the toughness of Bob's quilting, his Soldanship's hide had been marked that day with an English iron—to all which, be it true or false, no man could ever say nay ; for of the many that sailed with the bold Baron of Beaulieu, no soul ever found way back again to these parts, save only Bob himself, and old Roger Cole, who is as witless as a blind fly in October, through some odd clout he had on his pate from a Saracen hammer of arms, and hath not worn a rag to cover him ever since, but still swears he is St. Bartlemy that was flayed alive by pagans, and could never after bide clothes on his back.”

Leonard had, during this unjointed description, slowly turned on the route proposed by Hawkwood, and continued thoughtfully to

pursue it, to the great delight of his observant squire, who well knew his humour, and hoped that this light gossip was gradually dispelling the cloud which had more than once of late rendered the young citizen singularly capricious, and hard to deal with ; but the point of time had at length arrived, when eyen Gilbert's good nature and ready, though small wit, were to fail in their purposed aim. Of this, however, he was as yet unconscious, and taking Leonard's silence for a happy omen of his own influence over his mood, continued to rattle on in a style of description more florid, perchance, than correct—addressing himself equally to the companion by his side and the two delighted attendants, who hung all ears and eyes on his stirrup—

“ Sooth, masters, it will be a day to remember and prate about, this, when we all wag grey beards—for such bravery was never seen before—and they say that King Edward himself is to be apparelled like the Lord Mayor, bearing the City arms on his coat, as well as the Prince of Wales ; our own castellan, Hugh

le Brabazon, and twenty-four other knights as Aldermen; and these—the jousting over and the lists thrown down—are to keep open field against all comers for two hours after mid-day, such comers, if foreigners, being knights of gentle blood; or sons, or near kinsmen of merchants or shipowners, being free of the City.

“Think of that, gossip Leonard—of being privileged to change blow at barriers, or run a course in open lists, against the noblest gentles of the court; or may be with Edward himself, the best knight and bravest crowned prince in all Christendom !”

“Privileged !” echoed Leonard, like one who mechanically repeats the sound, without having caught the sense of a word.

“Aye, i’ faith!” replied Hawkwood, glad to have gained so much note—“and no mean privilege either; for it could hardly be expected, in reason, and surely does not belong to any other freemen, not born nobles, save us of the city of London.”

“Then wherefore called free men?” re-

torted Leonard ; “if withheld, save by occasional sufferance, from competing on terms, in all manlike encounter, with those who, being neither superior in wealth or wit, nor possessed by nature with any visible advantage over us, yet hold to themselves the power to will as a grace, that which the truly free shou'd hold as a right.

These barons, it is true, when they would draw the City purse-string, take us to their costly favour ; loose us to make good sport for them at a holiday time, and subdue their pride to change a day's fellowship with some of us, to encourage our tricks, and keep us in good face ; but, their ends gained, the play is played, and they cast us from amongst them stripped of our gaily painted borrowed coats, and held as cheap in their eyes, as the worthless chaff blown from out the winnower's sieve, when sifted from the golden grain it once encompassed round and guarded.”

They were by this time arrived by a turning to the right, which led southward by Warwick-house towards Ludgate-hill : here, there-

fore, Leonard halted, being resolved to turn off by that lonely way, in order to avoid crossing the course of any portion of the procession it was not his intent to join ; here also he purposed to part from his followers, and to this effect once more announced to Hawkwood his decision.

“ It is but waste of time and breath, both of which ye will need, if you look to bestir yourself in this day’s sport, good Gilbert ; so seek not to alter my fixed will.”

“ Nay, but Leonard,” cried Hawkwood, touched by the tone and look of melancholy his proud companion in vain strove to conceal, “ it were but a child’s trick, to abide by a will which is so quick born, and of such small reason.”

“ ‘Tis of no such sudden birth, trust me, Hawkwood ; I have been, long before this turn, within a thought of my present act, but have striven stoutly against it, and might have done so to-day, also, but for the chance that delayed me.

“ But, even had this fit gone over, it yet

would have spurred me to a like ending, at no very far period, and at no fitter than this present ; so, do thou, comrade, take with thee these good fellows, and make forward for Kennington, for, 'twould grieve me sore, did my evil humour mar others sport : and Cyril, here, I know, hath made his mind up to win the City's prize, malgre the best bows out of Lincoln that shoot on the King's side."

"I will draw no bow to-day, Master Leonard, if ye fare not forward in company ! so Lincoln or Liddel may win the cup, and wear it for Cy Denman, he cares not," grumbled out the honest fellow, in a tone of surly, but evident concern, at the bearing of his young master.

"Nor will I," said Hawkwood ; "I was chosen by thee to ride by thy rein, for this day, Len Borgia, and thou shalt never say I left thee, because thy course did not suit my fancy ; thou hast been wronged or thwarted by some one, I can see, and, by good faith, an thou'l set on, I'll stand by thee till thou'rt fully righted, be it against whomsoever it may."

"Thou wilt anger me an thou movest one foot on my path, Gilbert, further than it may reasonably seem to tend thy own way," answered Leonard; "Trust me I have had no wrong, and have no need of help; nor, if I had, would I wish for a heart more stout and true than thine own: so, prythee press me no further, for thou know'st not how this wilful kindness wounds me."

"Well," cried Hawkwood, stretching forth his hand, "an thou wilt, thou must—so, in God's name, ride thy own course: but yet, 'tis past belief," continued the kind-hearted fellow, retaining the hand of Leonard, and addressing him with an air of solicitude and remonstrance, "that thou who hast bestowed such rare pains-taking to win all the arts of fence, with every trick of the *manége*, and art so well learned in them all, shouldst avoid such honourable occasion of displaying thy skill as may rarely, if ever, happen in our time."

"There it is, and thou hast said well," replied Borgia, hurriedly and bitterly; "what avails this cunning of lance, sword, or steed

to him who may not honourably guide aught but the instrument of his craft, save at some time of privileged fooling, like the present, when the lordlings of the court congregate to laugh at the lout citizen's aim at gentle deed, and make loud wonder, in our very hearing, that hand of ours can rule lance or horse for a fair course.

“ I tell thee, Gilbert, that I am sick of this mockery, and swear, that I will never draw bright blade again, save at my King's command, or for self-defence—nor ever again put armed foot in iron sautour, unless I am free to touch, in the sun's blessed light, the proudest shield that ever knightly hand hung on tree of honour : and that, Gilbert, is a sun that may never rise on thee or me ; so fare thee well.”

So saying, he turned his horse down the lane, and rode briskly away, leaving Hawkwood yet more mystified than ever, by this, to him, incomprehensible explanation of the motives which ruled the conduct of his truant leader.

"I know not what sun thou lookest for, Len, or what moon has crazed thee, but since this truce with France is now fairly over, and blows once more afoot, Gil Hawkwood will shew, ere long, he hath not had *his* schooling at fence for nothing!—there lives no squire or knight shall strike far before me, in a press, come what may; and I'll shew the best of them, that the hand which, for seven good years, guided steel needle thro' Flemish broad-cloth, hath pith enow left to drive cold iron through the stoutest hauberk ever buckled over Frenchman's breast! What say ye, lads, think ye not Len hath a touch of witchery about him?"

"Thou hast said it, bully Gilbert," answered Cyril, with an air of familiarity he did not use in his master's presence, "he is devil-rid, for surety, so it were no friend's part to leave him to such rule, and alone; for if he rides towards Charing, or Westminster, in that harness, and in his present humour, 'tis ten to one but he comes to some harm, for the folk there bear no good will toward this day's

bravery, and will strain a point to pick a quarrel with Leonard, if he by chance come within ken of any that know him—and, faith, there be some that ought, for he's often put his mark on a few of their pates, in days past."

"Thou speakest wisely, Cy—and thus we'll rule us: do thou, Jocelin, that art sharp-sighted and quick a-foot, keep on his spur, whilst Denman and I beat wider a field, till we shall see what way this gnat-bitten gossip means to wend him."

In pursuance of this friendly purpose, the younger groom moved smartly a-head, whilst Hawkwood and Cyril more soberly followed, canvassing at length, the probable and improbable causes for the altered bearing of Leonard Borgia, whose gallantry, gay humour, and good fellowship, had, at one time, made him second to none, in the hearts of all such of his comrades and followers as were possessed, in any degree, of those qualities akin to his own.

## CHAPTER X.

AFTER proceeding as described in our last chapter, for a few hundred yards, Leonard once more checked his pace, and gave vent in audible murmurs to the spleen which ruled him.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “was I born a churl,” whilst a cold thrill ran through his veins at the base word; “or why was I not gifted with the contentment becoming my place and calling, not filled with this wayward and repining spirit, which for ever sighs after that it sees no means to compass!”

In this mood, having once more tossed the rein on his horse’s neck, he proceeded through

the least public ways in the direction of the river : these bye places were every where nearly tenantless, and few signs of occupation might be seen, save that here and there a gossip was carried on across the narrow way, from opposite windows, between some old dame and dotard, whose limbs being past the service of a walk to Gracious Street, Bridge-foot, Southwark, or any other place in the line of road to Kennington, consoled themselves with comparing the pageant they could not see, with those they had assisted at in the good old times of Harry of Winchester and Longshanks, his noble son ; a comparison which told greatly in favour of those elder doings.

Indeed, on this day, most part of the great City was left to the keeping of childhood and old age, except the streets immedately in the line of the procession ; but that these were fully thronged, the busy hum of myriads of voices mingling, which came on the wings of the gentle south-east breeze, from the direction of the bridge, bore excellent witness.

Leonard became amused, and the current of his wayward fancies in some measure diverted, by striving to catch these jocund sounds which ever and anon rose swelling in his ear, and rushed onward away, till almost lost in distance, and which might have been aptly likened to the hollow roar of a far off surf, as it breaks in continuous thunder over a long line of shingly beach.

By degrees, and almost unconsciously, he sought to approach yet nearer to the sound, until at length it raised in him a desire to quietly catch some glimpse of a scene of excitement, so natural to his age and temperament; with this feeling he continued to bend towards the water side, by the least frequented ways; but to approach unrecognized any of the accustomed stairs, crowded as they doubtless were, with those who eagerly sought to gain the Surry shore, by a route less tedious than the over-peopled passage by the bridge, he felt was a hopeless effort. In this dilemma, and just when counselling within himself to give over the attempt, and make for home, he found himself

at the entrance of St. Andrew Street, and perceived that the barrier, which had for some months denoted it impure, and under ban, was thrown partly open, and, as it appeared, by hands which had consulted convenience and speed more than completeness in their work, for the materials which had composed the barrier, yet lay as they had been beaten down, leaving a rude passage, like the breach in a stormed wall, for such as chose to enter.

This was included in, and formed the extreme western limit of a considerable circuit of streets, or rather lanes, which were depopulated and laid under ban, till they should be considered purified, in consequence of their having been supposed to harbour and retain the germ of a series of fatal fevers, which, under the general and fearful name of pest, had continued to ravage England, with slight intermission, and greater or less virulence for some years, and, indeed, was almost periodically repeated through many later ages, amongst a population densely packed, and not over cleanly in their domestic habits.

Leonard was aware that the time of the proscription was nearly passed, and naturally conceived that some of the inhabitants, eager to return to their ancient dwellings, had anticipated the day of restoration, and were come to set their home to rights, from which, despite its pollution, it had required the strong arm of power to coerce them.

Be the cause what it would, here was free egress leading to the point he had purposed gaining ; the route, one little likely to be sought by many, and in that particular alone desirable, yet still more so, perchance in his present mood, from the very fact of its being interdict and forbidden in a penalty originally no less heavy than the loss of life to the offender.

Thus moved, he crossed the fallen barrier without hesitation : but not without a thrill of the blood, nearly approaching to awe, did he gaze upon the desolation about him : the stones which formed the, at all times uneven way, were now nearly hidden by the rank vegetation which had thriven in this damp and shelter-

ed bottom : the air, too, of the place was pregnant with noxious vapours, which rose thick, and ungrateful to the senses, and of this the very brute seemed sensible, as by his hard breathing and frequent snortings, he impatiently evinced—most of the houses were windowless, and the hand of rapine ever daring in search of plunder, had been at work even in these dreaded confines ; from all the doors the iron-work bolts, hinges, and chains, had been carried off ; the lead had been stripped from the balconies ; of these, some had decayed and fallen, others in wantonness were broken down, and the materials strewed abroad, until the way was absolutely encumbered with the wreck of this ill-fated quarter, blasted and desolate in the very heart of a capital, where all else upon that summer's morn shone gay and glittering, healthful and secure.

Thus moralizing on the scene he had so strangely been led to witness, Leonard continued his course towards a turn which he knew should lead him to Saint Andrew's Stair, communicating with and commanding a full view of

the river, its embattled bridge, and crowded waters.

The noise of the multitude was now heard in a loud and continuous hum, unvaried, except by the echo of his own horse's foot-fall as he steadily paced his way down the deserted street; when suddenly this quiet was rudely broken by the near sound of voices threatening and high in quarrel—Leonard halted to listen, and again they came yet more distinctly on his hearing, now mingled with a cry of “murder!” followed by the clink of hard blows given and received; on the hearing of which accompaniment, the noble Soldan instinctively neighed back a gallant challenge, drew up his arched crest and smote the ground as if eager to closer greet this war-sound, as one by no means strange or displeasing to his ears.

Leonard tightened rein as he bent his head to ascertain exactly the direction of the noise, when his apprehension was fearfully quickened by the wild screams of a woman, which now rung shrill and piercing above the fray.—He listened not longer, but giving the impatient

horse free head, pressed forward a few hundred paces in a straight line, guided by the cries ; when opening a narrow lane on his right, running parallel with the river, he found himself within a short space of encountering a cavalier, who approached at as quick a rate as the rough way would permit, right towards him, sustaining a female on his lusty left arm, who supposing her the same whose cries called Leonard to the rescue, had now happily changed resistance for insensibility, for she hung apparently lifeless across the saddle-bow of her ravisher ; whilst some short distance rearward, a fierce struggle yet appeared to be going on.

Without a moment's hesitation, Leonard reined up, so to command the narrow way ; at the same time placing his lance firmly beneath his arm, he cried aloud to the rider to “ Hold, or look well to himself, for pass he might not, without some question.”

“ Give way, Sir Knight, or 'twill be to your cost,” boldly shouted the rider, in Norman French, as he yet pressed on—at the same instant dexterously turning aside, with the stout

blade of his falchion, the head of the disarmed lance that threatened him, he gave his horse the spur, seeking to break way to the right of his opposer ; but Leonard, with the quickness of thought, turned the stout butt of the weapon of which he had short hold, and struck the man so heavy a blow full on the breast, that he was fairly borne against the wall, whilst his horse suddenly pulled on his haunches, slipped on the rough stones and fell : Leonard, bending forward, strove to catch the arm of the lady, as the falling man drew her back with him, but the portion of her habit he caught, broke away, and alone remained in his firm grasp ; and at this moment he felt himself dealt such a rude blow on the head as, but for the temper of the basinet he wore, had left him short time for shrift.

He turned to defend himself, and letting fall the headless lance, reined back, drew forth his sword, and in the next instant found himself dealing blow and thrust for life or death, with no ordinary sworder, but against one whose strokes were rained on him so fast and heavy, that, al-

though excellent at his guard, Leonard was, for the first minute, indebted for his impunity rather to the good armour of proof he wore, than to his personal skill.

This first fierce assault, however, once abated, he quickly shewed that if he could bide blows coolly, he could also return them as promptly, and his antagonist soon found that he was bound to bestir him at his best, if he expected advantage in the fray, especially as being but half-armed, his person offered many assailable points ; for although having on a close helmet, he wore neither brassarts nor vambraces on his arms, or cuises on his thighs, and had therefore, when in his turn he stood on the defensive, more points to cover with his weapon than Leonard, whose body and limbs were equally cased in steel.

During the combat, the fallen horse, together with his burthen, lay a little in front of Leonard to the right ; the man, by his groans, seeming to suffer greatly, when two other riders of the party coming up, one of them hastily dismounted and endeavoured to disen-

tangle the lady, the other being apparently intent upon making past to aid in the assault on Leonard, by getting in his rear, which the active opponent of the youth observing, he suddenly drew a few paces back, and addressing the man, cried.—“ Whither would’st thou press, thou clumsy knave ? ” then pointing to Leonard, who could not follow in upon his antagonist without leaving those, whom he sought to detain, in his rear ; he added, “ heed not that crazed fool, but let Wilhelm lift the wench before thy saddle ; and then make thou on, whilst I deal upon this meddling mar-sport, whoe’er he be.”

“ And with God’s help, you shall find that as much as one man may well do, and not come worst off,” replied Leonard. “ But who and what are ye that do this outrage ? Within bounds, too, forbidden on pain of death, in open despite of the City’s law, and on a day devoted to gladness and kind courtesy ! ”

“ Thou wouldest have shewn more wisdom to have parleyed before dealing blow, young

sir ; but as thou hast borne thee well, the valour thou hast shewn shall excuse thy lack of wit for this turn, an thou wilt yet be advised and quickly turn croup on those, who deal but with their own ware ; and seek not further to hold one, whose path may not be safely crossed, or will stayed, whether in walled city or plain field.”

This cautionary threat was conveyed in a manner perfectly cool, but with an air of such habitual authority, as denoted the speaker to be no common person, had any thing been needed to confirm this after his bold bearing ; but it nevertheless failed wholly to taint the resolution of the young citizen, whose blood being fairly heated, he felt rather nettled than awed, by the imperious tone of the stranger ; at the same time he likewise felt the jeopardy in which he stood, and wisely conceived it best not to be over hasty in pressing a broil, upon such ground, in which he might, by possibility, find himself in the wrong when too late to repair his error.

Restraining therefore his temper, which prompted him to brief parley, he mildly, but firmly, answered.

“ I seek not to be a hinderance to your way, Sir Unknown, an your course may prove fair and lawful ; but women are not wont to receive the well-meant courtesies of their friends with fearful screams ; nor do they need to be held across the saddle-bow of him by whose side they wish to ride, or borne senseless over the road they seek to go ; I should well deserve to be held for less than man, had I, when so appealed to, done less than I have done ; the blame be on your head if I do more.”

“ And who, then, art thou, that dost prate so high, and deal so peremptory ? ” demanded the Knight.

“ I am but an humble man, with no true claim to the spurs I wear,” replied Leonard ; “ I am nephew to Messer Borgia, merchant and gold-worker—a born Englishman, and free citizen of London. Now, Sir Knight, please to raise your vizor and proclaim your name, and promise on your word to do no wrong to

her you bear so helplessly in your company, and you are free to pursue your way : if you refuse to do this much, your purpose can be to no good end, and you pass not here without first biding blow with me, nor after, move one foot before my horse's head unless yours have the better speed, whilst I have a heel to press, or a hand to guide him."

"Ho, ho ! Sir Knight of the hammer ! cry ye pardon ; I knew not I held point against such haut personage as one of the Barons of Patten-alley : God's head ! but thou art a sturdy churl, and doest much credit to the chivalry of Cook's-row."

The stranger uttered this in a tone of the most cutting derision ; then turning to the man, who had just succeeded in raising the still senseless ladye to his comrade's saddle, he added—

"Ho, knave, reach me here thy lance !" As he yet spoke he bent forward, and caught the weapon he demanded ; then dexterously backing his horse he retired some twenty good paces, and laying the lance in its rest, levelled

the point against the unshrinking youth, who shewed no disposition to give up one inch of the 'vantage ground he held; whilst, in a voice where mingled anger and contempt strove for the mastery, he continued—

“Now mark me well, young Sir whelp of Lombard-street—an that be thy kennel—if thou dost not instantly give way back to the very wall, and leave free passage, without further let or questioning, I swear, by the honour of that belt and spur—the which I hold it is deep disgrace to suffer such as thee to wear—there shall be a post unfilled in this day's pageant; and although I may well shame me to turn knightly weapon against such carrion, yet shalt thou die gentler death than hath been often the wont of thy base kind.”

“Base in thy false throat, thou foul-tongued ravisher and disloyal Knight!” retorted the youth, more stung by this contumelious speech than heedful of the deadly weapon that threatened him: “Look well to yourself, Sir braggart; for if you are coward enough to use such weapon of 'vantage against me, still will

I, in God's name, abide the course as I best may, and do here defy thee to the uttermost."

Turning, as he spoke, his horse's head, so as to face the threatened career of his adversary, Leonard sat warily observing his next movement; and although almost hopeless of avoiding, in such a confined space, the arm of one evidently so accomplished in the use of both horse and weapon, yet determined, at all hazards, to make brave attempt.

The unknown Knight too held back for a minute, as if yet willing to afford him time to retire, had he been so disposed; but observing that his position bespoke him resolute to abide the shock, he first hurriedly whispered some directions to the man bearing the ladye, who had just fallen to his rear; then sharply reining up his horse, and with the spur forcing from him two or three demi-volts, to rouse his mettle for the short course, he loosed him to his speed and dashed forward, resolute to transfix his opponent, or bear him from the saddle at his lance point.

He was yet in mid-career, when his horse

was brained by an arrow from some unseen hand, and stumbling onward, fell head foremost to the ground, whilst the Knight, flung violently forward by the suddenness of the shock, rolled before the feet of Leonard's steed, and there lay, bereft of motion.

The act to which Leonard owed his safety was so wholly unforeseen, that it was only when a known voice from behind, shouting—"Well and truly shot, Cy!" together with the hasty approach of horse, reached his ear, that he became fully aware of the mode of his rescue.

"Fare forward for Langbourne!" again merrily shouted Hawkwood, pressing his horse hotly over the rough-laid pavement, to the imminent risk of his own neck, and utter disregard of the animal's.

"Hah, for Langbourne!" briskly echoed Leonard, as, spurring forward, he encountered the bearer of the ladye, who sought to make a dash past him; when, dropping the bridle from his hand, he passed his left arm round the object of his gallant effort, and with his right dealt so hearty a thrust against the

man who yet sought to hold her, that his weapon passed half-blade deep beneath the arm raised to ward off the threatened blow.

Retaining his prize, Leonard was borne some distance ere he could check the impetus given to the gallant beast he rode; whilst the wounded man, cast backward in his saddle by the force of the youth's assault, was thus carried in an opposite direction by his steed, headlong amidst the ranks of a small party of lances who rode close upon Hawkwood's heels, and with very little more of caution than guided the movements of that gallant apprentice, who, together with Cyril and Jocelin, was, by the time Leonard had turned his horse, ranged ready by his side.

The new comers, who might be composed of some half-score men-at-arms fully equipped, were now drawn up across the entrance to the lane, and thus reversing the position of our hero, penned him within the *cul-de-sac* he had so lately commanded, whilst, upon what may be termed the middle ground of this picture, lay the discomfited Knight, whom Cyril's well-

timed shot had overthrown, now sustained against the knee of one of his followers, but as yet giving little apparent sign of life.

"Who be these that have followed so fast after you, Gilbert?" demanded Leonard of the astonished Hawkwood, who gazed upon him and his fair prize; and, indeed, upon the whole scene with an air of bewilderment absolutely whimsical.

"Marry, I know not," he replied, extending his curious survey to the group in question, "unless they be simple passers like ourselves, laid on this scent by the same cry that brought us up in such good time, or rather Cyril's broad shaft; for, by Saint Mary, we'd all a come too late had not that goose feather flown the faster."

"Ho there, stand, lances," called out Leonard; then directing his speech to the seeming leader of the horsemen, one or two of whom were hastily dismounted by the fallen Knight, he demanded, "who are ye, and on what errand? The Knight who lies there may not

be moved without word with me, unless you seek to hold him to rescue by force of blows, the which I here defend in the King's name."

The leader, first exchanging some few words with one of those who had been from the first concerned in the affray, now rode a dozen yards in advance, and addressed himself courteously to Leonard, who stood fully prepared for a stout defence, having Hawkwood on his left, sword in hand, and the two archers, one of whom had already so well proved his skill, holding their arrows ready notched close by his other side.

"Sir Knight," began the Cavalier, lowering his lance point, and led from Leonard's appearance into the same error with regard to his rank which his late antagonist had fallen into.

"Too much, as it appears, hath been already said, and over many good blows stricken about such light matter as the present object of dispute.

"The prize is, however, with you, an it be

worth the winning; and in God's name keep it, an it prove worth the keeping ; for us we seek not aught but to return quickly with this sore wounded gentleman, and in that it were not for your ease you seek to interrupt us.

“ I pray you, rather as you have been fortunate, be courteous, and make wise and gentle use of your present advantage, or more blame will be incurred in this business than some of us here present may abide with life.

“ From the ladye herself you may hereafter learn all you could hope to know by the detention of any here ; and will doubtless be then at liberty to use such knowledge as shall seem best to you.

“ Then declare freely, shall we so part, or will you unadvisedly strive to hinder those whose numbers you cannot in reason hope to stay, and whose course you may not cause to be tracked or followed ? ”

“ Marry, but we'll shorten that course for some on ye, an we come to measure distance,” stoutly retorted Hawkwood, on his leader's failing at the instant to reply ; but Leonard

had considered the position in which he was placed more reasonably.

It was most true, as the stranger urged ; stay the party before them he could not, even at life's hazard, if they determined to proceed ; and that they were likely to prove so determined, what he had already experienced well assured him.

He was also conscious that his own movements for defence were wholly compromised through the fair incumbrance he bore ; and who, by a quick succession of convulsive quivers and deep drawn fitful sobs, now warned him that she was about to become once again awakened to the knowledge of her situation ; a promise of animation which any renewed alarm might change to a second and more dangerous relapse into insensibility ; this, as he bent a hasty glance on the death-like but perfectly formed face which rested against his breast, he felt was a risk not to be endured ; and he who had a few minutes before ventured himself so recklessly, now shrank with feminine nervousness from a chance of

renewing the encounter, or in any degree risking the gentle being's safety by seeking to effect more than was absolutely essential to that end alone. He therefore made answer to the terms proposed by replying as frankly—

“ Be it as you desire, Sir Knight, take up your companion and his followers, and go your way, leaving us free to follow ours ; for I pledge my faith that neither myself nor any with me shall seek to hinder or trace your steps for this present time ; reserving, however, the free right to take whatever course may seem best to me hereafter, to requite this day's sore outrage against the helpless damsel I now bear before me.”

The Knight bent his head slightly, as if acquiescing with this explanation ; then, raising his lance, gave the word aloud, “ Close ranks and make forward,” an order which was immediately obeyed by his followers, who had already disposed to their best ability of the two persons hurt in the late encounter.

After standing fast for some few minutes,

until the clink of the last retiring hoof was lost in distance, the leader, without further word, put spurs to his own destrier, and followed in their track who had gone before.

Thus left alone with his friends, Leonard alighted, and giving his rein to Cyril, made towards the river with the yet senseless female, who, to his great joy, continued to give occasional though painful signs of returning animation. Within a few yards of the stair he observed lying close together a couple of dead bodies sorely disfigured ; one, from the hasty glance cast upon them by Leonard, seemed a sturdy middle aged man, clad in the garb of a Flemish mariner ; the other wearing the habit of a substantial burgess of the same country.

Passing this fearful group the youth descended the stair, and seating himself on the lowest step raised a little water in the hollow of his hand, and hastily sprinkled it over the pallid face and neck of his prize.

A short convulsive trembling followed, but

so violent that he himself shuddered to the full as much as his patient, lest, by having applied too rude a remedy, he should yet scare away the half-recalled spirit he sought so anxiously to cherish.

After a few seconds, however, he had the delight of beholding her lids suddenly unlock, and a gaze of bewilderment fixed upon his face, through the slightly raised silken lashes which curtained eyes so dazzlingly bright, and yet so soft, so beautiful, that either Leonard had never before this, fully encountered the glance of woman, or all eyes which had before met his, were dim or dead, compared with those now looking fearfully and enquiringly into his own.

Whether it was that the expression they found there, proved sufficiently reassuring to inspire with instant confidence, that helpless maiden, or that, at some time during the encounter we have described, she had become sensible of having found a champion, and, in the pitying, anxious glance she now beheld, read of rescue and security, or whether it was

that she had become as yet but imperfectly awakened to a sense of her state, we are not prepared to say, but strange to tell, after gazing earnestly, for a moment, on the face of him who sustained and bent scarce breathing over her, she calmly re-closed her eyes, and heaving a long-drawn quivering sigh, turned her head upon his shoulder and slept, or seemed to sleep.

Lost to all but the more than joy of that moment, charmed with a touch of seeming confidence, which he did not pause for one instant to analyze, the delighted youth felt borne above himself, at once raised and refined ; his young blood coursed through his veins with more tumultuous rush than had impelled it even in his recent stand for life or death ; and that one timid glance of the helpless thing he bore, together with the gentle act which followed it, more stirred the heart within him, than had the fiery flash and deep-toned menaces which broke through the barred aventaile of his knightly foe.

He continued for a minute's space to look

upon that ladye where she had turned her so contentedly to her repose; his eyes were filled with more than happiness, and suddenly, urged by an impulse new as irresistible, he bent his head, and fervently pressed his lips upon the pale cold cheek, pillow'd by his iron-sheathed shoulder.

Even with the doing of this bold act, he became conscious of its impropriety; and, apprehensive of observation, fearfully raised his head, and looked around, to behold Hawkwood on the step above eyeing him with a knowing leer, and an air half impudent, half demure.

Abashed and vexed at being thus noted, Leonard started at once to his feet, demanding somewhat hastily, "How now, Master Hawkwood?—wherefore stand ye there, staring agape at me, as if the sight of a dead or dying maiden were matter for light gaze?—stir ye, and bring up the horses as close as ye can, that we may hasten to where help is to be had."

"And where think ye had we best guide us,

to come by that same help, at the quickest, and quietest, and fittingest, eh, good sir, of the rescue?" enquired Hawkwood, with an air of levity, somewhat too apparent for the occasion.

" What place nearer or more fitting than the house of mine uncle? who is, moreover, himself no little skilled in leech-craft," coolly answered Leonard, assuming an air of severity, which was lost upon the blunt nerves of his companion; who, still retaining that knowing superiority of manner which London habits, even at this date, did not fail to induce in those who considered themselves well up to town; after humming and hawing for an instant, went on with—

" Now that, gossip Leonard, methinks, would hardly prove a wise course to take, with this same goodly armful of womanhood you've got before ye here,—ha, ha, ha! by St. Mary Magdalen, old Messer Andry would gaze like a sunned owlet at your company."

" Speak thou less glib-tongued of my honoured kinsman and master, sirrah Gilbert,

or thou wilt cross me," coolly whispered Leonard; then, as if deeper and more painfully stung, he hurriedly demanded, " hark here, dost thou know aught of her of whom thou pratest so slipper-tongued and lightly?"

" Not I, i'faith," replied Gilbert, carelessly glancing at the object in question, " I fly not at such fine feathers, not I; but mind me, 'tis like enough that Messer Borgia may; since he is often about the court, with carcenets, and skewers, ear-bobs, hand-rings, brooches, and such like trickery for the lordlings and their ladye light-a-loves; now if this turn out so, you'll get, methinks, but small laud for your day's doing. Harkee, Len, best take her to old Crowe's, in Paradise Row, or over the water, to the Flanders Frows on the bancke, or to the Cardinal's Hat, by Paris Garden; let her bide quietly there, where, I'll warrant, she'll find all care, and small questioning, till such time as you shall find how this stray bird stoops."

Though utterly ignorant, from personal cognizance of the places named, yet was their infamy well known, by report, to Leonard;

bending, therefore, a look of anger upon the honest but coarse-minded speaker, which he could ill endure, Leonard silently mounted the steps and passed on to within a few paces of where the men stayed with the horses ; then, as if having, in some measure, mastered his heat, he stopped short, and, addressing Hawkwood, said, in an under tone—

“ I have made out thy meaning Gilbert, though somewhat slowly, for it was hard to credit that one, even so brainless and brute-witted as thou art, could but look upon this young, this scarce blown flower, and fancy taint or blight had ever stained its freshness ; but I do see thy drift : and now, mark me, Gilbert, had tongue of man, having more wit or less honesty than thine, ventured such loose speech within my hearing, I would have struck my iron glove in his teeth, ere he had done breathing the foul lie, which one honest glance upon this noble and pure brow, would have disproven without question or word. Blush for that vile knowingness that could so blind thee, Hawkwood ; and by no word or look of

lightness, seek to again display thy ill-gained cunning, or if thou dost, take wary heed that I observe it not."

"I seek not to do or say aught I will hide from any man," bluntly retorted Gilbert, stung to the quick by the hot speech of his friend, whom he loved as much as stood in awe of ; "nor meant I offence by that I did say. I guessed not you knew the maiden, Leonard, or I would have bit my tongue off ere it should have wagged word to dishonour her.

"But you well know how over testy Messer Andry is, and I feared some blame to myself, an we come before his ken, so strangely freighted ; he is ever on my back for all that comes ill off between us, when he thinks I'm in your company, and, as thou knowest, has more than once rated roundly on thee for sorting with me, or the likes o' me, though born perchance of as honest a father as he, or any Frenchman of Rome."

"Enough, enough," cried Leonard, stepping up to Cyril, who held Soldan's rein : "say not word more, but ride with me as far as the end

o' Chepe, for some mischief may yet beset us in our narrow way ; and that service done, go whither ye list, without being seen by my uncle : I will myself bear all the blame that may come of this day's rescue—but stir not from my side till I am so far, good fellow Gilbert; for though at times I like not thy mouth-wit, I know not the hand of man I would sooner lean to, than thine, at a pinch of need—so pryck thou a horse length or so before, whilst I and these good lads follow thy leading.

## CHAPTER XI.

RE-CROSSING the overthrown barrier which had marked the entrance to this forbidden quarter, our little party found themselves once more within the public haunts of men, having as well as they could guess, escaped observation.

Hawkwood, according to his directions, led the way through the least frequented streets and alleys, until arriving parallel with their course, he made a sharp turn to the left, and soon after emerged from the labyrinth of houses close by, where it was purposed they should separate. Leonard thanked his com-

rade; and stretching forth his hand in token of perfect reconcilement, bade him God speed.

"A free welcome to you at home," cried Hawkwood, "and blythe waking to your comely burthen that rests so quiet one might doubt her woman. I will make on to Kennington ; and since it must be so in my own company, which I less kindly take to than with that of any other good fellow I know ; I shall be in full time for the tilting, and though you've lost me my right to place, it shall go hard but I find room amongst some of our company ; I will tell ye at even-tide, an ye be in the humour, all of the play that remains to the good after I get there."

Leonard commended this purpose, and would fain have had Jocelin and Cyril to follow the example, but the fellows refused the proffered liberty, deciding upon returning home, and contenting them with the evening and night bravery which was to follow.

As they neared the dwelling of his uncle, Leonard strove to collect and compose his yet confused and hurried senses, and prepare him-

self for something like a reasonable account of his wild rencontre. He well knew his uncle, though gentle and kind-hearted to the last degree, was apt to be somewhat tetchy and discomposed by any great violation of his ordinary habits, which were those of extreme quiet and clock-like preciseness. He occupied a very large mansion, originally built for a family residence, by one of the De Warennes, partly because he had need of the extensive out-precises, which were converted into stores for the reception of the merchandize of the foreign houses, for whose affairs he was agent—partly, also, because he considered this noble residence as only commensurate with his station, as one of the principal Lombard merchants of London ; and, lastly, that he might be enabled to proffer hospitality to such of his stranger correspondents as might now and then visit England.

Except on such occasions, which were sufficiently rare, he lived in absolute seclusion, occupied with his accompts, his graving tools, and his breviary—to each of which he in his

turn paid equal attention ; not that by nature he was either inhospitable, or solitary—but he had originally been thrown, when young, an alien and unknown, into the great City, ignorant of the language or mode of the country, and amongst a population at no time prone to look with favour on foreigners, but at this day dreadfully prejudiced against all bearing that stigma—for such was it considered—although the feelings which generated it were nearer allied to envy than contempt ; since the citizen felt that in the superior intelligence, enterprize, and industry of these strangers, and in the excellence they displayed in all the arts of the age, they had powerful competitors in the career of gain, which they would fain have shewn, was, or ought to be, their exclusive monopoly.

Then, as at present, free trading found few advocates ; and each man, confining his view to his proper counter or craft, beheld only, in the present gain of the alien trader, his own loss ; nor ever raised his eyes to look upon the larger advantage which the country gradually, but

slowly, reaped from extended relations, and the yearly improvement induced by the ingenuity of their rivals.

Borgia's sole claim had at first rested simply upon the superior delicacy of his handicraft as an ornamental jeweller ; which profession, after the fashion of the times, embraced a much larger scope, and held a higher flight in art, than is at present comprehended in that term ; he had, consequently, to the full, encountered all the annoyances attendant on his situation. His exclusion from the respectable in his own grade, amongst the natives, was complete ; his protectors were found amongst the wealthy few of his countrymen resident in London, and his patrons amongst the nobility, to whose luxury he ministered—most of whom encouraged him, and such as him, simply because their wares suited their vanities : but a few there were, of superior mind, who looked on art with a nobler view, and in the fostering care they paid to taste and genius, beheld extending the broad foundations of their country's future greatness.

Thus isolated, self-dependence was induced,

and solitude became familiar, until what was at first borne as a necessity, in time grew to a habit; and although the patronage of the first Edward's tasteful queen had early laid the basis of the ample wealth which now crowned his industry, and enabled him to indulge the expanded views of his mind, by combining with the labours of his bench the grander speculations of a general merchant, so that his original calling was almost forgotten in his later greatness; and Andrew Borgia, the Roman gold-worker, scarce recognised in Master Borgia the Lombard banker and merchant; yet were his ancient ways but little changed, and he continued to live as a stranger in a strange land.

'Tis true, that for the motives we have before quoted, he had, a few years before the commencement of this narrative, purchased from the Crown the vast mansion he now occupied; but the two maiden ancients who migrated with him from his former snug dwelling by the Bridge-foot, had received but one *aide* in addition to their own force, to assist

them to trim the wilderness they were set down to order, and render habitable—an exertion which their master soon simplified, by limiting their cares to the small clearing, absolutely necessary to their comfort, and which was here little extended beyond the compass to which they had been so long accustomed.

On Leonard's quitting the roof of the Brothers of St. Botolph's, where he had been carefully instructed in the lore of the times, and had for some years resided—excepting during the terms of vacation—the establishment received the further addition of two grooms, who were found needful to administer to the wants of the young man and take care of his horses, of which he had seldom less than four—although the old merchant, whimsically enough, persevered in never naming more than one, or seeming to know the stud had been increased since the day when, in addition to his own mule, he first made purchase of a stiff, long-backed, short-legged hobbeler—which purchase, upon the youth's desiring a horse, he presented to him, with a gleeful assurance that “the

beast was reasonably slow, very sure-footed, and exceeding tranquil;" and although he soon beheld a very different animal under his nephew's saddle, he looked, or affected to look, upon this, and all his after-mounts, as so many exchanges, which he noticed now and then in the way of approval or condemnation, as the appearance of the animal chanced to bespeak him quiet, or high-spirited.

But in all other particulars the house of Borgia continued solitary as before; excepting on matters of business no stranger ever entered within its walls; nor had his youthful kinsman on this point sought to induce any change, such as might, perchance, have been effected through his influence, which was, though mildly exerted, paramount with the fond old man.

Leonard, like his uncle, when within doors, required little save his books and quiet; and if he ever lacked change or recreation, he could always attain both, and at the same time delight the aged artist, by joining him at his bench, and assisting, or affecting to assist, in

some of the more fanciful and elegant portions of the art he still pursued, and with a skill far beyond the times.

The richly-chased wassail cups, signet rings, and armlets of Andrea Borgia, were long recognised, and distinguished from all others by the elaborate cunning of their device and superior workmanship, and valued proportionably amongst the tasteful and wealthy of both Court and City.

The out-door amusements of the rude age were also numerous, and highly exciting to the vigorous and young; and in most of these Leonard early joined, with an ardour that alarmed his uncle, more than even the praise he earned delighted him.

Latterly, however, he had either become wearied with the sameness, or anxious for some wider field for his ambition—or, as is most probable, was led to view his own situation in society with a morbid and unjust feeling, in consequence of a real, or supposed slight, passed upon him at a grand City running, which had been held in Smithfield on the preceding

Easter, of which it is now necessary to give a brief retrospect, since it will the better enable the reader to comprehend the feelings which wrought, even at this hour, so strangely and so powerfully, upon our youthful hero.

It chanced then on the occasion alluded to, that some of the nobles of the Court, then held at the Tower, had ridden within the walls to view the City sports, and partake of the good cheer of the wealthy citizens, as was by no means unfrequent in these days, when the deep indent which lay between trade and aristocracy, was actually impassable to the former, and there was therefore less danger, and more condescension, in these and the like politic courtesies, which served, for a time, to reconcile to their state a class, whose wealth gave power, and forced respect, in outward forms at least, from the proud and privileged lords of land, although they did not yet, as their wise descendants have done, receive the rich traders into their order ; thus, in reality, securing its permanence, and adding to its power, by the accumulated wealth of these recruits, who pass

a life of labour in one class, on purpose to amass the gold, wherewith another may uphold the sinews of its greatness.

At the time of which we treat, the line of demarcation was complete, and too well defined to be lost sight of, because occasionally crossed; like oil and water, the parties might flow together for a time, but there was then little apparent chance of their ever permanently co-mixing.

The courtly visitors were therefore on the occasion alluded to, received in all humility, and thankfully welcomed, by the attending authorities. The most honourable places were cleared for their ladies, in the gallery, which overlooked the lists ; and such of their attendant esquires as might choose to seek honour against the City youth, were courteously entreated to enter the arena.

As many had come prepared to share in this favourite and eagerly sought sport of the age, a party, termed of “the Court,” was quickly formed, against that styled of “the City.”

The joust was spirited enough, and carried

on with a success much too equal to please the courtiers. It so happened that, in the several courses that were run, Leonard was, in various degrees, the most successful lance on the one side, whilst, on the other, the young Lord James Audeley gave ample promise of that agility and hardihood which, in after years, shewed so conspicuously in the many bloody fields of France.

At length these two were pronounced the only parties left unattainted, and singly therefore the youthful champions prepared to front each other in a last struggle for the prize. Their ages were, as near as might be guessed, equal, their bearing and appearance exceedingly similar, and the individual prowess of each had stood out in bold relief, even amongst the best of their several parties; uncommon interest was therefore naturally felt for the event.

It was agreed that this, the last course, should be free; in other words, that the lists crossing the middle of the ground, and preventing either party pressing on the other, should be removed,

and the field left clear for the combatants to do their best with the blunted weapons allowed on these occasions.

They flew to meet each other with the rapidity of young eagles, and never was course ran in a more gallant spirit, or with truer aim, than this first encounter between the young citizen and his noble antagonist : the stout lances of both were, at the same instant, shivered to the very gripe, full on the opposing shields they sought to attaint, whilst the cavaliers passed on, unshaken in their saddles, amidst the loud huzzas of the men, and the softer breathed, yet far more inspiring plaudits, of the attending fair.

Taking the full sweep of the enclosure, they returned each to his own end of the lists, whilst the friends and well wishers of the champions, received their favourites with various quaint greetings of encouragement. “Well stricken, Audeley,” “Fairly placed!” called out many of his approving comrades.

“Bravely held, bold squire! I warrant thy

spurs will be kept bright, win them when thou wilt, young bird of a bold breed ! ” shouted a sturdy looking yeoman, who supported himself on a slight projection of the gallery, under which the youthful noble once more took his stand to receive from the courtly dames above as numerous, though less heartily expressed, praises.

“ Right gently borne, James Audeley,” murmured one fair maid, as he gracefully bent over his saddle, in passing along.

“ Choose tougher lance, cousin James ; let Colthurst pick for thee ! ” called out an elder dame, experienced in such matters.

“ Thou must not leave this prize in the City, or thou art no longer squire of mine ; so bestir thee, young gentleman,” impressively whispered the Lady Agnes Beauchamp, as she stooped over the gallery, in which she occupied the place of state.

To which, and all other such gentle speeches, the court champion answered but by bows of acknowledgement and mute thankfulness ; since

it was not the custom for those engaged to use word with any without the lists, that so all foul counsel or advantage might be avoided.

Similar greetings to the above awaited the City's defender at the opposite barrier, close up to which, and as far northward as the distant walls of the opposite houses, the space was filled with animated faces, and glistening eyes ; whilst, from every tree and house-top, window, and balcony within ken, kerchiefs were waved, and hands were clapped together, to convey to Leonard the admiration and encouragement of their comely occupants.

Fresh lances were quickly chosen, compared, and delivered : again was the Marshal's truncheon held aloft, whilst silence was enjoined by his serjeants, from opposite sides of the lists—again the trumpet sounded—and, with the blast, the eager youths loosed, and urged forward their mettled steeds: but, whilst yet hardly mid-way in his career, the horse rode by young Audeley swerved, and refused to face the bit, leaving thus his rider to be taken at certain advantage, without help or remedy.

But Leonard Borgia, though he quickly observed this chance, was far too noble in his nature to avail himself of it, as, without reproach, he might have done—yet, keeping the first level of his lance, as if bent upon striking his disordered adversary, he, when within little more than a foot of his mark, suddenly and adroitly raised his point, and so passed onward to the further end of the course, whilst the before scarce breathing multitude gave vent to the new impulse this generous act inspired, in one simultaneous and deafening roar, followed by cries from all sides of—

“City! City!” “A Leonard for Langbourne!” “A free and right gentle passage!” “Bravely forborne, young Borgia!” and such like phrases of admiration.

Audeley felt to the full the debt he owed his adversary's generosity, and would, in the like spirit of courtesy, have here resigned the prize in his favour, but such an arrangement was, when proposed, modestly and thankfully, but firmly, rejected by Leonard, and the young noble, in consequence, compelled to prepare

for a third course, having first demanded and obtained the permission of the judges to mount another horse.

It was during the interval consumed by this preparation, that Leonard received his first disgust of the situation in which fate had placed him, from the gallery we have before noticed, and under which his reverse position now placed him. Of a truth, the remarks of those of the Court who sat there were not conveyed in a tone that courted concealment, and were certainly less flattering to the young citizen than those of his friends, at the other end of the space. More than one tongue expressed a desire to look upon his face, adding, in a tone of mock pity, that they regretted his cervelliere had but little chance of being raised that day—unless it was to give him fresh air, and free breathing, after the overthrow which must terminate his next course with the Lord James.

Touched, more than one wiser, or of elder experience, would have been, by these and such like unmannered remarks, which con-

tinued to be banded about, amongst the young lordlings, during his brief repose, Leonard inwardly vowed to do more than his best to bare his features to their gaze—not for air alone, but to receive the prize which, he well knew, the highest and proudest of the demoiselles above him had been appointed to award to the victor.

Nor did he vow in vain ; for, in the third course to which the trumpet again called him, the lance of Audeley, levelled rather too low, struck the rounded edge of Leonard's vambrace, and slipped, almost unfelt, aside, whilst Leonard, choosing the most difficult, but, at the same time, most honourable mark, aimed to plant his blow against the front of his adversary's helmet, and bore his point so truly to that end, that it took effect right beneath the young noble's crest, and, forcing him backward, flung him fairly out of his seat, headlong to the ground.

The City's success was now achieved, and the area of old Smithfield never rung with louder cheers of triumph than rose from that

multitude, when the Marshal loudly awarded the prize, and the honour of having borne him best, to their young defender.

After first slowly parading round the ample space, amidst these loud demonstrations of favour, preceded by the marshals and their train, Leonard, with a throbbing heart, was conducted to the gallery, there to receive, from the hand of the Lady Agnes Beauchamp, a rich belt and sword, the allotted prize of this day.

The Lady Agnes, naturally a proud woman, and rendered more so by the homage to which she had been ever accustomed, was no longer young, but she yet possessed much of the great beauty, and all the brilliant wit which had rendered her the friend of Isabella, and the delight of her gay court, and which, even on the fall of that princess and her party, had kept her the no less admired and ruling star of the third Edward's.

Her almost constant residence at Warwick House made both her character and person

well known to the citizens, and it was rarely she, of all others, was induced to assist at any civic spectacle, however high. It was not unnatural, therefore, that Leonard, as he approached, and noted the indifferent air, and cold and haughty brow of the noble damsel, should inwardly regret that his lot had not been to kneel before some humbler patroness.

“ We here,” cried the Marshal, presenting his charge, “ have brought to your presence, him who hath been duly proclaimed the best lance at this day’s running, in order that he may receive, at your grace and pleasure, the City’s prize, the which it has been his good fortune so to win, and which will be worn with double honour, coming from the hands of so high and thrice noble a maiden as the Lady Agnes Beauchamp.”

“ Give me the sword, Sir Marshal,” replied the ladye, “ and let us look upon the face of the young citizen, who has had such a lucky chance against James Audeley; marry it will teach our young gallants not to play so loose

a game within your lists for the future, but to come better mounted, and not hold City running so over cheap."

It was thus this proud ladye haughtily intimated that Leonard was rather to ascribe his success to the contempt of City prowess, which had led young Audeley and his fellows to come indifferently mounted to this meeting, than to his superior skill. As she spoke, she indolently rose to receive the weapon from the hands of the Marshal, whilst Leonard, bending on both his knees before her, lifted from his head the close cervelliere, or outer helmet, worn during the course over the simple basinet, which usually left the whole face exposed.

"Why, who is this?" exclaimed the Countess, turning obviously pale as she bent a look of rivetted and painful interest upon the youth—"who is this, I say, that kneels here?"

"Leonard Borgia," replied the Marshal, proceeding literally to enumerate in due form all the particulars noted on his formulary; "the nephew to Messer Andrew Borgia, mer-

chant, and—” but here the impatient ladye broke in with—

“ Leonard Borgia ! impossible—he has deceived you, this is none such as——speak, young sir, who are you ?”

“ Even that which you have heard me called, ladye,” replied Leonard, rising indignantly to his feet, and led, by what he had before heard, to construe this questioning into a fresh desire to insult.

“ Why, this is marvellous !” again exclaimed the ladye, her brow darkening with the very severity of her continued examination of the features of the youth ; then turning to the Marshal, she hurriedly continued—

“ There sir, do you take the sword, and gird it about this young man, for I find it something over heavy for my handling ;” and in truth the weapon shook in her grasp, as she presented it to the wonder-struck functionary ; then sinking back into the seat, she continued, curiously, though with a more composed look, to watch the progress of the investiture, or rather the person invested.

"God and St. George speed this good gift!" cried the old Marshal, laying his hand on the sword pommel, after having drawn the buckle of the belt. "May this good weapon never be drawn but with right, and never be it sheathed but with honour!"

"Amen!" Leonard ejaculated, as bowing low, he gladly and hastily withdrew, amidst the smiling approval of the fair circle through which he moved.

But these commendations came too late, and were now unheard or unheeded; that haughty ladye's scorn had pierc'd too deeply within his sensitive and proud spirit, and those first heard contemptuous whisperings lived in his hearing, long after the shouts of triumph which preceded and followed them, were forgotten.

By others present, the ladye's conduct was either unnoticed, or set down for the caprice of one full of strange fancies, and heedless ever how she shewed her humour.

Some days after this indeed, Messer Borgia smilingly told his nephew the Lady Agnes Beau-

champ—on whom he had that morning been waiting at her express desire—had spoken of him in terms of high commendation, and greatly praised his bearing at the Easter jousting ; but it was long before Leonard could think upon the subject of that day with tolerable composure, so heavy was the cloud that hung over his first triumph ; and never since had he attended one of the meetings of his youthful compeers, although he was much importuned to join them as usual in their sports.

It was not, in fact, without much entreaty he had even been at length induced to fill the most honourable place assigned to him in this day's pageant ; for which such costly preparations had been made, as led to the expectation of its by far outdoing all former shews of the kind ; as in truth it did, and the “Jousting at Kennington” is yet noted as a “marvellous effort of wit and cunning device” by our elder chroniclers.

How ready the yet green wound was set to fester afresh, and to what curious results it led, has been already shewn. We will now therefore

proceed to enter within the walls of Messer Andreas Borgia, whither the young stranger was borne by Leonard.

On his alighting in the court yard, he was closely followed by the two wondering ancient maidens, who had come forth to gaze at his unlooked-for return. The third domestic damsel, who was young, had claimed on this day the license of youth, and been permitted to try her fortune in a crush for the show, at which, she left home with the expectation of beholding her sweetheart Jocelin, assist.

## CHAPTER XII.

SILENTLY, with hasty step and beating heart, Leonard carried his fair burthen through the long entrance passage, to a small chamber usually appropriated by him to the purposes of study, and thence called his own chamber.

Amongst the few articles of luxury with which it was appointed, there was a very roomy and comfortable couch that had been provided by Leonard, for the ease of Messer Andreas, and was oftentimes occupied by the old man, when of an idle even-tide he would entreat his nephew to read to him from some romaut, church legend, or the gayer pages of the Pro-

vençal rhymers, as might chime with his humour, either of which rarely failed in the desired, though disavowed, effect of lulling him quickly into a gentle and sound repose.

Laying the maiden upon this place of rest then, Leonard continued for a few moments to gaze anxiously upon her face : “ death’s pale flag” had wholly usurped the natural crimson of her cheek, and the existence of life was alone to be inferred from a scarce perceptible and fitful breathing, save now and then, when nature seemed struggling to maintain her dominion, and a quick succession of sighs, or rather deep-fetched sobs, would shake the frame of the sufferer, to be again succeeded by the more fearful calm of that death-like sleep—if sleep it could be called.

“ Bid your master quickly hither, good Agatha,” said Leonard to an aged sharp-featured and eager-eyed spinster, who, with her gaunt, spare form bent over the couch, curiously watched one of those hysterical fits we have mentioned, and at its close, roused his attention by her pitifully intonated, “ Woes me ! alack,

alack ! what marvels here ? ” and such like interjectional notes of gossip admiration.

“ Bid him down, instantly, good dame, for here is loud call for all the skill in leech-craft he boasts.”

“ Aye, will I do that ; but who, honey Leonard, who shall I tell him it is that thou hast gotten here so sore afflicted ? ”—demanded the old gossip, curiosity striving with the sympathy she really felt for one of her own sex suffering so deeply, halting as she spoke by the door, towards which she had at first nimbly moved.

“ Say, here is one who desperately needs his help, and my good uncle will not ask question more—or, stay—bide thou here and look to the ladye, since my limbs are the lightest.”

And with these words, the youth impatiently passed out, leaving the two crones to exchange their shrewd guesses together, until Deborah, cunningly suggesting that it was more than likely Cy’, or Jos’, were well acquainted with the cause of the fair damsels trouble, and their young master’s marvellous taking on, Agatha, second in place and power, though

the senior in years hobbled forth eager to propound the purposed queries to the grooms ; whilst her companion, with the ready tact of her sex, sought to loosen such of the fastenings of the ladye's dress, as were at all likely to hinder her free breathing ; occupied in this and a pretty close examination of the material and quality of its component parts, she forgot for a while the more serious subject of her curiosity.

Leonard meantime hurried up stairs, and found his uncle fixed in nearly the same position as when at early dawn he had so unexpectedly stumbled on him.

The old man, perfectly unconscious of his nephew's return, was busied in wearing away a day, lost to all other business, by cutting an elaborate device taken from sacred story, upon a massive patina, he was preparing as a grace-offering to his Eminenza, the Cardinal d'Os-sat, then resident at Windsor, who had been shortly after his arrival in England, plundered of his chapel plate, and indeed of all else he carried with him ; for whilst journeying with

the escort of Sir Walter de Beaumont, and his brother, the Lord Bishop of Durham, near Rushyford, they were assailed by a bold companion, named Gilbert de Middleton, who robbed, as a king makes war, under his own spread banner and for his own advantage, and by him, was Cardinal, Bishop, and Baron, stripped of every article worthy appropriation.

“ Why, how now, Leonard, back so soon, with brow unmoistened and coat unruffled ? ” cried the old man, as roused by the sound of his kinsman’s hasty tread, he turned to greet his entrance, “ an no ill hap hath sent thee home thus quickly, thou art the more welcome.”

“ A lucky hap hath been mine this morn, uncle, that by holding me from the course I aimed to follow, has turned my poor help to the good service of one who much needed succour, and else might not have found it.—But stir ye, and descend to my chamber, below, where your skill will be little less timely than my chance aid.”

“ Ah ! ” cried the old man, raising his eyes and fixing them enquiringly upon his nephew,

"Thou hast not sure been taking part in a brawl, or borne hither any hurt ruffler?—such can lack no help of mine in this great city, and it was ill done, Leonard, it was ill done of thee to yield to such a fancy—my poor skill in hurts goes not beyond that of the simplest of the barbers, whose poles grow thick enough in every street; and besides, thou well knowest I love not to look on these weapon gashes. This too I made known when, time back, you bore that idle knave, Hawkwood, off the street, and laid him before me, with a rent on his crown that would have stunned an ox, though it failed to reach brains of his;—now will I wager this is that very same scape-wit lying hurt, below."

"Guess not again, good uncle, for you will never so come nigher truth than you have; but descend quickly, and when you see the being who needs your help, withhold it an ye list.

"Come, come, dear uncle, hold by my arm, and be not so over ready to blame honest Gilbert, for all my mischief; for an he'd proved less forward to-day, you'd have had hurts of

mine to look to, which would have passed mortal surgery.

"All I seek is that you give present help, and withhold question till such time as the first shall prove effectual, when the latter shall be fully answered; and I promise that after such hearing you shall hold me blameless at the very least."

If the evident anxiety depicted in the countenance, and speaking through the tone of Leonard, had roused Messer Andrea's curiosity, how increased was the interest which filled him when his glance first rested upon the scarce earthly form, over which his aged housekeeper hung, as Leonard led him to the couch.

Deborah had, by this time, divested the maiden of the Flemish cap of velvet she at first wore; this cap was cut to fit the shape of the head, and formed at the same time a sort of tippet, which, buttoning round the throat, was continued downward in thick plaits over the shoulders and bosom. The removal of this, consequently disclosed to view, an exquisitely turned throat, and bosom of faultless colour,

whilst a profusion of black glossy hair which had been tightly compressed, the better to fit beneath the cap, loosened from all thrall by the withdrawal of the broches which had restrained its luxuriance, now partly fell, waving over that fair neck and bosom, or lay in silken masses about the beauteous head it sprung from.

“ Why, in the name of wonder, how came this fair dead maiden here ? ” exclaimed Messer Borgia, with a voice wherein surprise and pity mingled.

“ Dead ! ” echoed Leonard, springing to her side, “ ah, say not so, sir—feel, feel here, dear uncle, there is a low, but evident throbbing within ;—place your hand here,” he cried, laying the old man’s palm above the ladye’s heart, “ and feel if there be not somewhat that beats beneath.”

And the youth spoke not, stirred not, breathed not, as, watching the look of the old man, he abided his opinion.

“ It is true, here is yet surely life—the soul lingers, loth to abandon an abode so lovely,”

muttered Borgia, partly to himself, after having carefully pondered over the wrist he had taken, and yet retained beneath his fingers, “the glass is at low ebb, indeed, but here is yet sand to run, and, though slow and low the beat, it betokens neither death nor disease.”

“Thanks to the Virgin, and praise to you, my wise and kind-hearted uncle,” joyously broke forth Leonard, pressing between both his own, the hand of Messer Andreas. “You are right, sir, there is no disease, no death; she has been sore scared, and hath thus swooned from very fear, brought on her by apprehensions worse than death, but no hurt else.”

“Nay, here is more than a mere swoon, my son—I should guess there has been some most foul practice wrought on this poor damsel—tell me how long hast thou beheld her thus?”

Leonard, in brief, recapitulated all that related to his first encountering the ladye, and of the partial revival by the water-side. During his recital, another fit of those convulsive sob-

bings he was endeavouring to describe, cut short his story, but it was far less violent, and of shorter duration, than those which preceded it.

" So, Deborah," directed the old man, " raise her gently up, or, Leonard, here, thou art more able, do thou support her; so, let not her head droop; I have, within, some rare essences from the East, may help to stimulate the senses, which, I fancy are, even now, awaking within her, for nature hath already done her work, and needs small help of mine."

Thus saying, Messer Borgia left the apartment, and hardly had he turned from the door, when the sufferer once again unclosed her eyelids, and gazed around, but with an expression considerably changed from her last glance. After looking, for a few seconds, from one to another of the contrasted faces which anxiously hung over her, she snatched her hand from Leonard's hold, and passing it twice or thrice rapidly and tremblingly over her brow, next eagerly drew her long tresses about her bared

throat, and, shrinking closer to Deborah, murmured, in a voice low, broken, and agitated, but full of sweetness—

“ Pray ye tell me, mistress, where am I?—who and what is he, standing thus armed by my side ?”

“ Have no fear, sweet ladye, for you are in honest hands, and kind—be sure there are none in this house would willingly harm you or any living soul,” replied the aged gossip, striving to re-assure the startled stranger, who, after again closely perusing her face, continued—

“ You are a woman, an aged, and, as I rede, a good woman, and I ought to credit you; but, for the love of Christ’s mother, tell me, in a word, whose roof am I beneath, and who is he beside me ?”

There was a fearful eagerness about the manner of this enquiry, which admitted not of other than direct reply, and this the old woman was, at most times, incapable of doing ; Leonard, therefore, kneeling respectfully beside the couch, into the far corner of which the maiden had shrunk, and thence gazed eagerly

and wildly on him, took it upon himself to answer her; the which he did in a manner where gentleness and manly sincerity were too obvious to admit of after-distrust.

" You are now, ladye," he said, " within the dwelling of Messer Andreas Borgia, a merchant of London; and, in your poor servant, who kneels before you, you behold his nephew, tricked forth in bravery far above his station, the which was donned to fill up a part in this day's pageant, but has been turned to a better end, in enabling the wearer to do you some slight service, and to ensure your present security, and honourable though humble keeping."

The ladye listened intently until he had ceased to speak; compressing then her forehead within her small white palms, she disjointedly muttered, " Aye—I remember me now—of a strange wild landing place, and wilder fray, a place of desolation—and of desperate words and more desperate blows near and about me—but where is Van der Oom and the Heer Heylen?—they surely left the ship in my

company—are they safe?—bid them to me—let me speak with the kind Heylen, and that good seaman, Peter Van der Oom.”

Leonard readily surmised that the persons thus named were the two men whose bodies he had beheld lying where they had, even to the death, proved their faith to her who now so eagerly sought after their safety.

The opportune entrance of Messer Borgia released him from the embarrassment he felt at this question, which he knew not how to evade and feared truly to answer; turning to introduce to her his uncle, he therefore said—

“Here, ladye, is the master of this poor house, who will, with his own lips, speak for your welcome and surety;” but the object to whom this was addressed had once again fallen into sudden insensibility; and now, by turns, silently wept or fitfully shook and sobbed aloud.

“She will be well anon, this swoon once over,” cried the old man, “let her smell to this. Alack, alack! poor maid, thou hast cruelly been misused—shame to manhood that

could for any end so peril thy sweet life. Deborah," he continued, addressing the woman, " get thou nimbly to Agatha, and bid her prepare some wholesome drink with her best skill ; then do thou return hither straight, for the maiden an she wake to sense may not abide our faces so well as thine, though it be not of the freshest or fairest."

"That may be now, Master Andrew," sharply retorted the old woman ; "for, woe's me, time works sore changes on the bravest and beautifullest, and I'm no witch to be let slip unscathed ; but time was when—but there, there, that's all fled and were best forgotten too ;" and thus sighing over the recollection of her now disparaged charms, Deborah left the room to do the master's bidding, and nearly at the same moment the ladye again awakened to a full consciousness of her situation. She was, however, much calmer in her manner, and eyed curiously, but composedly, the singular looking personage who filled the situation before occupied by Deborah, and who

unceasingly repeated his injunctions, that she should "keep quiet and fear not."

"Are you, signór," she at length demanded in Italian, "are you the Messére Andreas Bor-gia?"

"I truly am so named," he replied, charmed at the sound of his own native tongue so musically given, "hast thou any knowledge of that name, young signora?"

"No greater than having often heard it used by one you should know well, since your dealings together have been many, in times past—I speak of the Heer Jacob Van Artevelde."

"That prince of merchants! vast dealings have, indeed, been between us two, and just and generous, and right noble have I ever found him."

"If you have so proved him," continued the ladye, "let me implore you, signór, to have confidence in me, his near kinswoman, and daughter, both by adoption and love, and presently lend me loyal help, both for his sake and for the sake of the King your Lord."

“ His daughter ! art thou the adopted daughter of the Signóre Jacob ? Welcome art thou to me as child of mine own would be, and tenderly and truly shalt thou be dealt with by both me and mine. But tell me, damsel, how came ye to light on so wild an adventure, and how chanced one so young and gentle to be moving so far from home under such ill convoy as that from which Leonard here luckily and in good time parted you ? ”

“ Your patience, signór, for one moment, and let me ask, whilst we are yet alone, if this young gentle kinsman to whom I owe so much, knows aught of two countrymen and attendants of mine, who were certainly with me when I this morning landed upon that dreary place, whose dreadful aspect is even now before mine eyes, and almost scares away my yet hardly awakened senses.”

Thus directly called on, Leonard, as delicately as possible, related how and where he had beheld these men, who had evidently fallen in defence of their charge. During his narra-

tive tears fell fast from the ladye's eyes, but at the end, and when she had drawn from the reluctant speaker that they were, indeed, past all help, she seemed to rouse her faculties as if spurred to exertion by some great exciting cause.

"Close to that door, Signór Borgia," she hastily cried, after seeming for a minute to take counsel of her own thoughts, "close to that door, so that we be not interrupted; and next let me entreat of you to send one that may be well trusted to the spot where those two slain are laid, and bid that he seek within the folds of that man's doublet who is the elder and taller of the two, and wears a garb of sober Flanders cloth, unguarded and sad coloured; in this, differing greatly from his companion in death, whose doublet is gaily slashed and overlaid with a velvet of some foreign colour; and who is, besides, a stronger bodied man, though the shortest in stature. Alas! they were nigher akin in their natures than outwardly they shewed, for Heylen was trusty, kind, and brave; and Peter Van der

Oom has left no stouter or better seaman behind him.

"But this is not a time to lament them," she went on, combatting the grief which had for a moment overcome her resolution, "let me explain: within the folds of that plain doublet, there will be easily felt a small pouch, this must be carefully cut from its hiding place, and brought hither to me, with all the haste may be; whilst we, meantime, devise how best and soonest to forward it to him whose weal it nearly touches, even," she added, in a whisper, "to King Edward himself."

"I will quickly unharness, and myself do your bidding," cried Leonard, turning to quit the room, but the ladye, with a gesture, recalled him, and, after pausing for a minute to gather new strength, for she was much exhausted, she again went on.

"Not so, I pray you; do not you leave the house, or doff that armour you wear, it may stand me in good stead, as it has already done this morning; send some one you know to be

trusty, and quick of foot, and pray heaven he come in time to do this errand, for much depends on it."

"Send thou young Jocelin, then," said Messer Borgia, "he is very honest, and right light-heeled—there is none better."

Leonard undid the bolt, and left the room, almost overthrowing, in his haste, the ancient housekeeper, who was just about to repeat the assault she had already more than once made, unheeded, upon the closed door.

She had met with little to satisfy, and much to provoke her curiosity, in the reports of her aide, Agatha, who returned from the stable utterly mystified and confounded by the strange hints of the two grooms there, who swore their master's injunction had forbidden any less ambiguous mode of disclosure.

Poor Deborah's wonder was not a little increased, therefore, on finding the bolt drawn against her re-entrance, and the climax of her amazement was, after escaping the hurried passage of Leonard, to observe the familiar and reconciled look of her old master, whom

she found seated upon a stool close by the couch, against the head of which the ladye calmly reclined, having drawn about her neck the folds of the hooded tippet she had been, a while back, disencumbered of.

"The saints be gracious to us!" cried the dame, making a desperate effort to solve this riddle, "but thou art marvellously better, ladye."

"Thanks to your assistance, dame," replied the invalid, graciously smiling, at the same time gathering within her hands the rich tresses which yet hung loosely over her shoulders, and aiming at their re-adjustment.

"Here, sweetheart, are thine own hair-bodkins?" cried the officious Deborah, anticipating her wants, and presenting the rich golden broches she had a while before withdrawn on removing the cap.

The costliness of these trinkets had not escaped her notice, or failed to add their quota to her stock of wonder, and, as she now handed them back to their owner, she went on—

"Marry, and rare ones they be, too; right gold, I guess;—ha, ha!—I've lived too long in this house not to tell gold by the handling—and pearl-headed, for certain: 'tis well they loosened not in the fall off horseback, I hear you met with, ladye, for such would not be easily or cheaply replaced, not being of English make or fashion—think ye they be, master?" she continued, holding one out for the inspection of the personage she addressed, who, looking not at it, gravely answered—

"I think not about that which concerns me not—and should not be the worse pleased to find that all within my house followed, in this, at least, my example."

"You have made right guess, dame," said the young ladye here, good humouredly interposing, to relieve the disconcerted dame from the embarrassment this abrupt impeachment had, for a moment, caused. "These broches are of French device; they were made by a cunning *orfèvre* of Paris, for the sister of an aunt of mine, who died whilst on a pilgrimage to our Ladye of Barège; for the sake

of whose memory I prize them more than for their true value ; so am I right glad they fell into such honest handling."

" Nay, I seek not to know aught of the matter," replied Deborah, with renewed confidence, " though Master Borgia there will ever rate me for being over curious.

" But are ye limb whole, and no bones shaken out, after your sore fall, pretty dear ? ah ! mercies !" she continued, in her most insinuating tone of enquiry, " but your friends will be in a rare fright about you."

" Not so, for my own tongue shall bear to them the news of my safety, as soon, to the full, as rumour may tell of my mishap."

" So near be they ?" exclaimed the pertinacious crone ; " well, well, be thanked they are so near at hand, for I doubt if ye will quickly be fit to move far, after so sore a turn."

" I shall need little help dame, after a draught of the good posset-drink you promised to have prepared for me—is't ready yet, think you ?" demanded the ladye.

" Aye, that must it, or close on, for I told

Ag' to bestir her hand, seeing you must ha' great need o' some strengthener."

Messer Andreas had listened so far to this parley, but not without exhibiting certain symptoms of growing impatience, which, although unnoticed by the loquacious housewife, the quicker eye of the young stranger had soon caught, and, by an occasional smile, endeavoured to suppress; here however his irritation prevailed, and starting up, he rose almost on tiptoe in his ire, as, looking into the pinched up face of the inveterately inquisitive dame, he exclaimed—

" And what help, tell me, will she have from this idle babble? Think'st thou to restore strength to her frame by thy bald chatter, or to quiet her nerves with the clack of a tongue, to which an iron mill-wheel were soft music.

" Thou askest questions as glibly as if my house were a hall of justice, and thou a sworn judge. Marry, know better manners, and keep thy gossip for my ears, that are used to and must abide it.

" Go, get thee gone, and bestir thee, to

provide some tempting and nourishing diet for my gentle guest, here ; serve it in the screen-chamber, and when 'tis ready let me have notice; meantime, hearest thou ? come not again near, unless called for, but leave this damsel to the quiet she hath need of, but may not find within sound of thy loud voice."

A sentence in his own tongue, being here addressed, by the ladye, to Messer Andreas, completed the mystification of poor old Deborah, who, muttering some words of excuse, hobbled from the room, to do the bidding of her petulant master; whom she had served years enough to know was not to be talked to in his moods, though it was but seldom these were exercised upon the directress of his *ménage*, whose rule was at most times pretty absolute; a circumstance which rendered this, as she conceived, uncalled for exhibition of impatience the more remarkable; and, together with the strangeness of the ladye's introduction, her unattended condition, and the intimate intelligence which appeared so magically established between her and one who had

become habitually averse to, and shy with strangers, might, altogether, have excited curiosity in a soil less fitted for its reception than the fallow mind of the ancient house-keeper, to an old bachelor ; penned up within four walls, and rarely looking on other faces than those of the usual inmates.

"We must not," said the ladye, as the inquisitive woman left the room, "we must not, Signór Andreas, by an over mystery, raise curiosity, for it will be best that this matter be not much brawled abroad, as you shall shortly know."

"But here comes your son, signór, for so, if I rightly heard, you called him."

Leonard at this moment entered the room.

"My nephew," proudly replied the old man, and his eye lighted with pleasure as it rested on the graceful proportions of the youth—"my fair nephew, Leonardo."

"Leonardo!" repeated the ladye, with the slow emphasis of one who seeks to impress upon the memory a certain sound, as graciously looking upon her preserver, she continued :

"but I shall not readily forget the name of one to whom I owe so much."

Leonard bowed low ; and there was a pause of some minutes, which was broken by the ladye again addressing him—

"I pray you, tell me, has one been sent on that sad errand I spoke of ?"

"One hath been some time gone," replied the youth, " who, as I should guess, is by this on his way back, since the distance is not much, and the runner sure and swift footed."

"A thousand thanks," she replied ; "and now 'tis fitting you should learn in how much I need your help, as well as shelter, for I feel it would be both unworthy and unwise to use distrust or deceit with you. Sit then by my side, whilst I disclose to you a mission which is and must be a secret to all but to you, who have become so strangely linked with my present fortunes ; and whilst I collect my thoughts, which are yet somewhat wild and wandering, let me again hear you, Master Leonard Borgia, rehearse at full the providence of my rescue."

There was a gravity and dignity in the tone of voice and in the demeanour of the adopted daughter of Artevelde, that went far before her years, and forcibly won the respect of her observers. They sat down by the couch, when, after listening to the recital of Leonard, which she contrived by her questions to render less brief than suited his modesty, she thus in turn made known her purpose.

“It will be needful,” she said, “when these papers come, that at the earliest they be delivered to your King, who, if I have rightly learned, keeps his court close by. I am at present unable and unfitted for this task, and thus is it most fortunate that I have near me so trusty a messenger to do mine office; for I am bold to promise myself that your kindness will not begrudge this added labour, since ‘tis less to do my bidding than the errand of your liege lord.”

“I would not be less spurred to it, an it were ~~for~~ your pleasure wholly, ladye,” answered Leonard, half blushing at his own bold compliment.

"Call me not so, I pray you," she said; "I am daughter of a simple burgess of Ghent, a citizen merchant like yourselves: would he dealt not with any weightier matters! I am called Bertha; as such I pray ye to know, and name me; and now tell me, will there, think ye, be much difficulty in approaching the King on this day of festival?"

"I know nothing of the forms that may stand in my way," replied Leonard; "but doubt not to accomplish my errand: 'tis yet within two hours of high noon, I have therefore good time to gain Kennington, ere the jousting is over; I was privileged to a place near the lists, which privilege I will claim, since it will the better help me to do your bidding."

"Have thou small fear of that, Leonard?" said Messer Andreas. "An thou art in need, e'en let King Edward know who it is seeks speech with him; I do not think he will be the harder to come at, through knowing that my near kinsman is a suitor, though I have lost mine ancient place in his favour." But I

hope, young maiden," he added, gravely addressing Bertha—"I trust, I say, there is no evil or danger in the tidings so strangely borne; or aught that may jeopardy or embroil us, whose occupation is peaceful, humble, and uncourtly?"

"'Tis a matter, as I guess," replied Bertha, "which deeply touches your King's safety, and perchance this kingdom's weal; so far you and all liege subjects of Edward are concerned; but likely rather to lead to your good, and to the honour and preferment of your nephew, than aught worse or more dangerous."

"Alas!" said the timid Andreas, "there is small honour, such as is so called, in Courts, which may be reaped without more of peril than mere breath is worth; nevertheless, Leonard shall do thine errand, even for thy father's sake, and for the bold King Edward's, whom I love though he has looked over me of late; for I would willingly risk something to serve him I remember a baby in the arms of his beauteous mother; ah, woes me!" but times are changed with her since that day."

The entrance of Jocelin here cut the old man's lament over the changed fortune of his patroness, Isabella ; the man had been as directed, but found his purpose anticipated, for, when he arrived, all trace of the bodies had disappeared, and of the late desperate affray no sign remained, save, as he said, "a few plashes of blood ; and these," continued the fellow, "these finger plates of a steel glove, rent from some hand that was grappled with by one in extremity ; they are rich, and of rare workmanship, see you, master," and the man handed to Leonard the pieces in question. They had obviously formed the joints for two fingers of the left hand, and were of the finest steel, richly damascened with Arabic characters and flowers of gold, mingled in tasteful device ; it could have been no light tug which rent them off the wearer's hand, since a portion of the stout leatheren gauntlet had broken away with, and yet hung to the plates which guarded it.

Leonard looked curiously upon the relic, evidently formed to defend no vulgar hand ;

dismissing Jocelin, with directions to bring forth his horse, and, with Cyril, make ready to run with him a short way, he next, handing it to Bertha, asked, if she recognized it as having been worn by either of her friends.

The maiden shuddered, and turned pale, as her eye rested on a dull, damp blood-spot that stained the bright surface of the steel, and returning it to Leonard, denied all knowledge of either of her companions having worn iron gloves at all, certainly none of such costly workmanship as the sample proclaimed these to be.

"I will, with your leave, keep this spoil," continued Leonard; "who can tell but it may one day lead to knowledge of that foul stain to knighthood, whose violence it was my fortune this morn to stay?"

"Be not rash, Caro Leo," eagerly urged Messer Borgia, ever startled at any movement at all energetic on his nephew's part; "be not over sudden in challenging, on such weak grounds, the faith of any man: Milan smith-work is no scarce thing in this warlike land;

and, if blows become again rife amongst us, there will not be a few gloves wanting fingers."

Agatha now appeared at the doorway, and, with a curtsy of more ceremony than it was her wont to use, announced that "dinner was served in the screen chamber."

On endeavouring to rise from the couch, Bertha found that she was indeed sorely bruised, and less able to nimbly exert herself than she had imagined ; she, however, rejected Messer Andreas' desire to have the meal removed to the side of the resting place she at present occupied, but, leaning on Leonard's arm, passed on to the screen-chamber.

Assisting her to a seat, Leonard continued to wait on the maiden's wants, despite her desire that he should himself sit, and take refreshment, until Cyril announced to him that his horse was ready.

He then took his leave amidst his uncle's oft repeated injunctions to be careful and prudent ; once more mounted his steed, and, preceded by his grooms, with very different

feelings and fancies from those which, in the morning, had filled his mind, turned towards Gracious-street, in order to make at a quick pace for Kennington.

END OF VOL. I.

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